

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 26 : Number Four : Winter 2005

Sexual Maturity in Africa

Teaching Sex, Love and Marriage

Evangelization from the Inside Out

Developing into Sexual Maturity

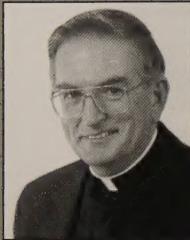
Coming Out Party

PROCESSED

JAN 03 2005

GTU LIBRARY

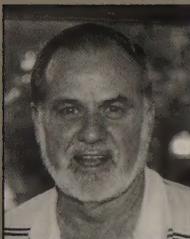
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Staff



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
WILLIAM A. BARRY, S.J., Ph.D., a priest, author, spiritual director, and lecturer, is codirector of the Jesuit tertianship program in the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. He lives at Campion Center in Weston, Massachusetts.



EXECUTIVE EDITOR
LINDA AMADEO, R.N., M.S., works as a consultant to the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality located in Nairobi, Kenya.



SENIOR EDITOR
LOUGHLAN SOFIELD, S.T., M.A., has conducted workshops on psychology and ministry in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, and India.



SENIOR EDITOR
BRENDA HERMANN, M.S.B.T., A.C.S.W., is a facilitator and consultant to groups and organizations. She has worked in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Australia, Central America, and South America.



FOUNDING EDITOR
JAMES J. GILL, S.J., M.D., a priest and psychiatrist, died peacefully on July 29, 2003, after a courageous battle with prostate and bone cancer.

The quarterly magazine **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by Regis University. Subscription rate: United States and Canada, \$36.00; all other countries, \$40.00. Single copies: United States and Canada, \$10.00 plus shipping; all other countries, \$10.00 plus shipping. Non-profit postage rate paid in Denver, Colorado. Postmaster: Send address changes to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 2005 by **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Send new subscriptions, renewals, and change of address (please include mailing label if available) to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834.

Letters to the editor and all other correspondence may be sent to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, 1353 Boston Post Road, Suite 11, Madison, CT 06443. Phone (203) 318-1886 / Fax: (203) 318-1102 / E-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

Visit our website at www.regis.edu/hd

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 26 : Number Four : Winter 2005

Contents

7
Sexuality Brewed in an African Pot: A Personal Account of Paths of Sexual Maturation in Africa
Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., Ph.D.

12
Coming Out Party
Valerie Schultz and Zoe Elizabeth Schultz

16
Understanding Infatuation and Devotion
Monica Applewhite, Ph.D.

21
Evangelization from the Inside Out: Bringing Faith to the Young
Thomas C. Fox

29
Sharing the Faith: Some Reflections on Teaching about Sex, Love and Marriage
John F. Kane, Ph.D.

35
Elder Sexuality
Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

40
A Spark Across the Gap
James Torrens, S.J.

42
Is God Enough?
William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.

48
The Other Side of Middle Age
Margaret Cessna, H.M.

2
ADVISORY BOARD

3
EDITOR'S PAGE
Developing Into Sexual Maturity

ADVISORY BOARD

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.

FOUNDING EDITOR

James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Linda D. Amadeo, R.N., M.S.

SENIOR EDITOR

Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.

SENIOR EDITOR

Brenda Hermann, M.S.B.T.

MANAGING EDITOR

Joan White, J.D.

INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The editors of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT are pleased to consider for publication articles relating to the ongoing work of those involved in helping other people through religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, education, and counseling.

Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Editorial Office: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, 1353 Boston Post Road, Suite 11, Madison, CT 06443; phone: (203) 318-1886; fax: (203) 318-1102; e-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

Reverend Ronald A. Amiot, S.J.

Monica Applewhite, Ph.D.

Steven B. Bennett, Ph.D.

Kathy Coffey

Most Reverend John Cummins, D.D.

Reverend Angelo D'Agostino, S.J.

Brother Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

Daniel E. Jennings, D.S.W.

Most Reverend James Keleher, D.D.

Vincent Lynch, M.S.W., Ph.D.

Sister Peg J. Maloney, R.S.M.

His Eminence Carlo Cardinal Martini, S.J.

Heidi McCloskey, R.N., M.S.N.

Reverend Gerard J. McGlone, S.J.

Reverend Kevin J. O'Neil, C.Ss.R.

Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D.

Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.

Nicholas R. Santilli, Ph.D.

Valerie Schultz

Sister Katarina Schuth, O.S.F., Ph.D.

Reverend William Sheehan, O.M.I.

Reverend Michael Smith, S.J.

Brother Edward J. van Merrienboer, O.P.

Reverend Michael F. Weiler, S.J.

Editor's Page

DEVELOPING INTO SEXUAL MATURITY

Since coming into contact with the work of Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan (*The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), I tend to think of novitiates and seminaries as “holding environments,” places where young men and women are “held” while they work their way to a new stage of their psychological, religious and spiritual growth. A holding environment, for example, is what a family is for a teenager working his or her way to a new identity as a member of, but distinct from the family. Novitiates and seminaries are holding environments that help young adults grow into the self-chosen identity of celibate priests and religious who can function on their own in a complex world.

More recently, I have begun to expand the purview of this notion of “holding environment” to include many other formation settings such as parishes, schools and universities, pastoral ministries in any setting, programs for training of lay ministers, etc. All of these settings have, as one of their functions, the job of helping people develop into mature human beings whose sexuality is integrated into that maturity. For example, Jesuit high schools and universities proclaim that their goal is to educate “men and women for others.” Any institutional setting whose purpose is to form mature Christians for their role in the world and the church can be seen as a holding environment.

It is clear that mature human beings must come to terms with their sexuality as part of that growth into maturity. Such maturity is the result not of a once-for-all-time decision, but of a developmental process that takes time and needs a nurturing environment. With some of the articles in this issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT we hope to help all our readers who assist in this developmental process to reflect more openly on its sexual dimensions and on their role in fostering growth to full Christian maturity. We want to indicate some of the complexities involved in coming

to Christian maturity in this complex world. The articles published in this issue only are illustrative of these complexities; they do not cover all contexts, nor do they provide definitive answers on how to set up a nurturing holding environment. Answers for the whole church will come only through the hard work of paying attention to the complexities of living in the modern world and of engaging in reflection on these complexities in tandem with serious study of the tradition of the church. I think it fair to say that, while the tradition has much to say that helps toward sexual maturity, the Christian churches do not seem yet to be effective in helping modern people to become sexually mature. The only way forward, it seems to me, is by honest exploration and discussion that include an exploration of people’s experience of trying to grow into such maturity.

The article by Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J., vividly brings to life growing up as a boy in Africa. It reminds us of how contextual and complex sexual maturation is. We who are helping to form youngsters can extrapolate to our own cultures and try to imagine what it is like for teenage boys and girls, to recognize how mysterious, frightening and, at the same time, intriguing sexuality can be for them and of how difficult to communicate with them it often is. The article by a mother and daughter, Valerie and Zoe Schultz, gives us insight into some of the pains and the joys of a parent and child coming to terms with the child’s sexual orientation. Again, it will help readers to reflect on their own experiences as parents and children dealing with the volatile issue of maturing sexuality. Monica Applewhite, Ph.D., offers the insights of researchers who have studied the differences between infatuation and committed love, insights that can be useful in the work of formation for Christian maturity. Tom Fox provides some tools for helping young people to internalize the gospel message and points to some of the tensions between the traditional teachings on moving

toward a mature sexuality and present understandings. John F. Kane, Ph.D., shares his way of teaching college students to bring to bear the Christian tradition with the reality of their lives. He offers one model of a holding environment in a college classroom. Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D., presents readers a very positive and uplifting view of sexuality in the later years.

It is by now almost a cliché to say that we are living in a difficult time in our world and in our church. But we need to be aware of how difficult an age it is; otherwise, we will look for scapegoats to blame for our difficulties. Nicholas Lash, the English theologian, has opined that we are living in a more tumultuous age than any in human history, precisely because the crisis we face is global in nature. In such a climate, where everything is being questioned, where most of the people on our planet feel unmoored and insecure, it is difficult to find our bearings. Those of us who are engaged in fostering human development share these feelings of insecurity and alienation. In such a world, how do we help young people to find their way, especially in the area of sexual development? As we try to discover ways to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and to help the future generations to grow into maturity, we need to be aware of the complexities we face, but also not to be overwhelmed by them.

In our modern world everything, it seems, is sexualized, and yet, it almost is as difficult now to talk openly about sexual maturity as it was in the Victorian era. We often are tongue-tied when we try to talk about sexuality with others. We have not developed a comfortable way to speak and write about sexuality. It also is difficult to speak or write honestly and openly because of the climate in our church and our society. If one tries to discuss such issues concretely, one can be attacked, on the one hand, for wanting to return to the "bad old days" of sexual repression, or, on the other hand, for not holding to time-tested traditions. But we must take the chance of being misunderstood because so much is riding on how we help people now to grow into maturity and wholeness.

For the rest of this Editor's Page I want to reflect on the kind of nurturing environment our "formation programs" need to be in order to foster the developmental process toward mature humanity. (I put "formation programs" in quotation marks to indicate that my remarks refer to all those places that can count as "holding environments," where older Christians help their younger brothers and sisters to grow into the

mature Christian adults they are called to be.)

What is that maturity? In brief, we probably can do no better than Freud's saying about such maturity: it shows itself in the ability to love and to work. To love means to have enough sense of self-worth that one can engage intimately with others and act for their good i.e., without using them for one's own self-gratification or self-enhancement. To work means to be able to do a day's labor with confidence, relative ease and inner freedom, i.e., without an excessive worry about oneself and one's competence. I would add the spiritual dimension of such maturity, namely an ability to engage in a relatively mature relationship with the Mystery we call God and to be able to foster this relationship in others. The church needs places where such maturity is fostered.

Can we give some indications of the type of places we have in mind? First of all, they need to be places where sexuality is a relatively comfortable topic of discussion, for example, within families, in the consulting rooms with priests and other ministers, within small groups in parishes for teenagers and young adults, and in high schools, colleges and universities. One does not grow to maturity as a sexual being in an environment in which sexuality is a taboo topic or one that can be talked about only with euphemisms and in hushed voices. If we believe that sexuality is a gift of God to the human race, then we need to be able to embrace it, not act as though it were a hot potato. So the church needs to help its ministers, lay and clerical, to become comfortable with their own sexuality and to select and train them with this dimension in mind.

Second, growth into full sexual maturity must be a major goal of all formation programs whose purpose is to help others to become able to function effectively as Christian adults in a complex world. As a result, all such formation programs need to develop ways to help future ministers, lay and clerical, future parents and indeed, all those growing into maturity as Christians, to become comfortable with their own sexuality and with discussions about sexuality. In these formation programs clear guidelines for behavior need to be given precisely because these programs are holding environments, one of whose functions is to uphold standards of behavior. But these guidelines must be put in the context of a developmental process. It is expected that it will take time and mutual collaboration for people to grow into Christian sexual maturity. People in formation programs need to be held with warmth and care as they

negotiate this difficult passage into sexual maturity.

Growth into such maturity will mean that people need to be honest with God and with mentors about what is happening to them as they move toward this ideal. They will have to grow comfortable talking about their sexual urges, desires and phantasies in prayer with God. To learn how to love others maturely requires God's help; we cannot achieve it by our own willpower. But that help does not come just by asking for it in times of desperation. Many of us have begged God for help to be made chaste only to find ourselves repeatedly challenged in actual life. More helpful, I believe, is that one be able to talk with the Lord in prayer about one's desires, hopes, phantasies, failures and successes. Such conversations enable us to develop a greater trust in God's help and sustaining presence as we engage in life and relationships. We discover that we do not walk alone as we mature, that the Spirit guides and moves us, that we walk with Jesus who knows what it is like to be a sexual being because he himself grew into his own mature identity. In the process our desires become more ordered, and we grow in the ability to love maturely.

These conversations with the Lord are to be fostered in formation programs for adulthood in the church. As people mature in such prayerful conversations, they will be able to speak more frankly about sexuality with their mentors and their spiritual directors. Any growth process is a matter of trial and error. The only way to grow is to be honest with trusted mentors such as spiritual directors about the ups and downs of moving toward the ideal. This guideline means that spiritual directors and other mentors will have to earn the confidence placed in them. They will have to be people who are known as trustworthy, who can keep confidences, who will help individuals face the issues involved in growing into sexual maturity with gentleness, compassion and honesty. In a word, they are people who accept others, warts and all.

To grow into the ability to love someone else maturely requires taking risks, e.g., the risk of being rejected by the other, the risk of failing the other, the risk of making mistakes in knowing how to love maturely now. The only way to become mature in loving is to take the risks of making mistakes, the risk of being self-centered in loving this person, for example, and of learning how to tell the difference between self-centeredness and genuine love of another through this often devastating experience. Because all our relation-

ships are colored by our sexuality, these risks of self-centered infatuation easily lead to sexual behavior that is immature. (Applewhite's article gives some indications of the difference between infatuation and mature love.) Hence, any formation program must provide behavioral guidelines, but their provision must be given in a way that fosters growth to maturity, not repression of sexuality. In the church we need to develop ways of providing such guidelines in the various "holding environments" that are formative of future adult Christians.

At this point I want to reflect on helping those whose orientation is homosexual to grow into Christian maturity. The principles are the same. However, we must realize that many, if not most, persons of a homosexual orientation labor under more handicaps in talking about their orientation and attractions in a religious setting. If they came to self-knowledge about their orientation during adolescence, most likely they had to be careful to hide the fact from most of their peers and probably from their parents as well. It is not easy to grow up as a homosexual in a culture in which all expectations are that one is heterosexual. In this issue, the article by Valerie and Zoe Schultz brings out some of the difficulties.

Catholic teaching also may not have been helpful to teens who discover their attraction to the same sex. Where a heterosexual teen is expected to engage in dating and exploration, youngsters who are homosexual or lesbian are told that their attractions are wrong, even sinful. As a result, they may not have been able to engage openly in the exploratory behavior that eventually can lead to a mature sexual identity and Christian love of another that is not exploitative. If they have been able to come to such maturity, it has been almost in spite of church teaching.

I have had the privilege, as spiritual director and religious superior, to listen to the experiences of men and women whose sexual preference is for their own gender, and who have come to the kind of Christian maturity I have been discussing. I have admired their courage, honesty and spiritual depth as they struggled to become mature spiritual persons, outstanding ministers in the church and contributors to society. The process to sexual maturity often is rocky and tumultuous, like many growth processes. Truth to tell, not everyone makes it to such maturity, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual in orientation. Talking about the process, it seems, has been a great help on

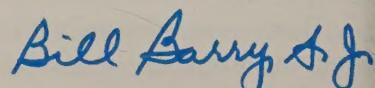
the journey toward wholeness. Listening to these experiences also has been a lesson about God's mysterious ways of drawing us human beings to holiness and to friendship with God. Those of us who engage in formation of any type in the church are called to help our homosexual brothers and sisters to grow to such maturity. We will be able to do it only if we can look on these men and women with the same compassion Christ has for them. Trying to walk in their shoes can help to rouse that compassion in our hearts.

Generally, people are more willing to tell the truth to someone who gives the impression of liking them. Try to think of the times when you have told someone something that you were ashamed of or that you rarely told others. Has it not been when you felt that the other person liked you? I have found that I tend to like people for whom I have some empathy, some fellow feeling, even if, at first, they put me off. Trying to walk around in the shoes of a teenager, a heterosexual male or a female young adult, a homosexual or a lesbian can help us to like him or her and thus to do our part to evoke the confidence to tell us the truth about their affective life. Valerie Schultz seems to have evoked such confidence in her daughter.

In a deeply moving memoir of his journey back to Catholicism, author Fenton Johnson notes that all human beings are called to narrow the vast gap between what we say and what we do.

A life of virtue consists of integrating the life that I profess and the life I actually live. Power resides in concealment; honesty represents a yielding of power, an effort to be transparent to oneself and to others....The greatest act of betrayal by institutionalized religions lies in making the discipline of honesty more difficult ("don't ask, don't tell" prevailed in the churches long before it was adopted by the military), rather than providing support for living it out (Keeping Faith: A Skeptic's Journey. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003, p. 202).

Johnson is writing as a homosexual who has found his way back to the church, but his words apply more generally, I believe. We need more places in our church that act as holding environments whose purpose is to help all young and not so young people to narrow the gap between the life they profess and the life they actually lead and thus to become mature Christians. I hope that the articles in this issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT will serve the people of God in developing such places.



William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief

PLEASE HELP US SPREAD THE WORD

We would like to reach more people with HUMAN DEVELOPMENT magazine, and you can help. Send us your e-mail address and the names and e-mails of people you think would like information about HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. (Our e-mail database address is hdinfo@regis.edu. We will keep this list private.) We will send them the link to the HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Home Page and let them know you recommended they take a look. As you know, there is no charge or fee for e-mail, and they can subscribe online if they choose to do so. Thanks for helping us spread the word.

Sexuality Brewed in an African Pot:

A Personal Account of Paths of Sexual Maturation in Africa

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., Ph.D.



In one of the classics of African literature, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1959), Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe describes a set of parent-child relationships. This first is between a doting mother and her bubbly pre-pubescent daughter:

It was not yet noon on the second day of the New Yam festival. Ekwefi and her only daughter, Ezinma, sat near the fireplace waiting for the water in the pot to boil. The fowl Ekwefi had just killed was in the wooden mortar. The water began to boil. . . .Ezinma was always surprised that her mother could lift a pot from the fire with her bare hands. "Ekwefi," she said, "is it true that when people are grown up, fire does not burn them?" Ezinma, unlike most children called her mother by her name. "Yes," replied Ekwefi, too busy to argue. Her daughter was only ten years old but she was wiser than her years. . . .Ekwefi turned the hen over in the mortar and began to pluck the feathers.

"Ekwefi," said Ezinma, who had joined in plucking the feathers, "my eyelid is twitching." "It means you are going to cry," said her mother. "No," Ezinma said, "it is this eyelid, the top one." "That means you will see something." "What will I see?" she asked. "How can I know?" Ekwefi wanted her to work it out herself. "Oho," said Ezinma at last. "I know what it is — the wrestling match" (pp. 40-41).

Our childhood games played a crucial role in my own sexual maturation and, I believe, in that of many African children.

The second occurs between a domineering father (the novel's protagonist) and his effeminate pre-adolescent son:

Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son's development. . . He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors. He wanted him to be a prosperous man, having enough in his barn to feed the ancestors with regular sacrifices. And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man. . . .

So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his Obi (hut), and he told them stories of the land — masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children — stories of the tortoise and his wily ways. . . .

That was the kind of story that Nwoye loved. But he now knew that they were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him (pp. 51-53).

The connection between these excerpts from a work of fiction and the subject of sexual maturation in an African context may not appear obvious. That is the point: the issue of sexual maturation or psychosexual development often takes an indirect route. It is assumed rather than consciously defined, which may explain the paucity of useful literature on this topic in comparison with the situation in Europe and North

America. The topic of "sex education" in many African countries generates considerable unease and tension especially in the time of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

A brief caveat is in order: the continent of Africa comprises more than fifty countries and boasts myriad religious and cultural expressions and traditions. As a Nigerian I offer only a personal perspective on the issue under consideration, albeit many years of Jesuit formation have exposed me to a welter of Africa's rich and evolving cultures. That said, the question is: What are some of the paths of human sexual maturation in cultural milieus where sex and sexuality largely fall under the category of taboo?

To begin with, the paths of sexual maturation bifurcate early in life for boys and for girls. I will point out later on that girls are better served when it comes to the quality and practicality of the information available. Underlying these divergent paths is a rough outline of the stages of life or progression of maturation espoused by many African cultures. Every child born into the family has a distinct identity, but remains essentially an isolated minor (or, as some would say, a "monad"). Upon the attainment of adulthood one is expected to contract marriage ("dyad") and begin the onerous task of procreation ("triad"), in order to increase quantitatively (in number) and qualitatively (the life-force) the family and the community.

IN THE NAME OF A GAME

*If I hold her hand
She says, "Don't touch!"
If I hold her foot
She says, "Don't touch!"*

But when I hold her waist-beads, she pretends not to know (A song from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, p.112)

The earliest recognizable stage of sexual maturation is that of the "games" we played during childhood. What I roughly translate as "game" covers a wide spectrum of recreational childhood activities that include dance, play and contests. Three elements characterize our childhood games: they involve a high incidence of physical touch, include boys and girls and largely are unsupervised by adults.

Our childhood games played a crucial role in my own sexual maturation and, I believe, in that of many African children. Because the games involve physical touch, usually they provide the first community-sanc-

tioned opportunity for exploring the makeup of the human body, in particular the sex organs. One of the tacit rules of childhood games is that children are allowed to touch one another without explicitly experimenting with genital sexual activity.

Some forms of dance will simulate sexual activity by wriggling the waist while both groups of boys and girls approach each other. In another kind of play an object is placed between the legs of participants, who are seated spread-eagled in a circle, while one member (either a boy or a girl) of the group makes the round, attempting to locate and retrieve the “hidden” object. In yet another kind of play, young boys and girls disperse in different directions, assigning to one member of their group the task of trying to discover their hide-out. The intervening period usually allows for boys and girls to engage in various forms of homosexual and heterosexual physical contact. At such times a child for the first time might feel a pre-adolescent breast or the erection of a pre-adolescent penis.

What truly is remarkable in the foregoing description of childhood games is that incidents of explicit sexual genital activity were quite rare. The community offered the child a safe and well-defined boundary to explore and discover the body in relation to his or her psychosexual development. Yet, like the games, this process happens literally in the dark: children may discuss and brag about their nascent pre-sexual exploits with one another, or compare the relative sizes of their genitalia or mammary glands, but they are never engaged in any sustained open talk about human sexuality by adults.

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL?

The situation changes when a boy or a girl reaches the threshold of adolescence. Usually a boy approaching adolescence has two sources of initiation into sexual maturation: socialization by circumcision (an affair organized by older male members of the community) and indoctrination by age groups. In cultures that still practice circumcision for teenage boys, this event ritualizes the passage from pre-adolescence to early adulthood. Besides being introduced into the ancient secrets and wisdom of the community, the initiate learns to understand the differentiation of gender roles and identity. After circumcision, his relationships with the maternal figures in his life undergo a drastic change. He is taught to keep a respectable distance

The community offered the child a safe and well-defined boundary to explore and discover the body in relation to his or her psychosexual development.

from them. As we saw above, in the case of Okonkwo’s son, these figures do not exercise the same influence on him as does his father or the paternal figures in his life (uncles and cousins). But this distance is fraught with a high degree of ambivalence; it is a combination of fear and attraction, violence and affection in relation to the female.

Because initiation rites tend to happen in age-specific groups, that is, within age sets or age grades, the pre-adolescent boy derives a lot of information from this context. The same would be true of cultures that do not practice circumcision as a form of socialization and initiation to adulthood. Much of this information garnered from age sets or grades is, however, based on speculation, and includes such myths as what happens when a boy’s breast leaks fluid or he begins to sprout pubic hair, and when he experiences nocturnal emissions and morning erection. Here again a culture of silence relating to human sexuality allows little opportunity for separating fact from fiction with the aid of adult members of the community.

A brief excursus on the practice of masturbation offers a concrete example of how false information and sexual myths — of the types referred to above — can distort the process of psychosexual maturation.

The received notion among many of my pre-adolescent peers portrayed regular masturbation as a necessary and healthy practice to relieve the testes of the pressure caused by a continuous buildup of sperm. It helped, we assumed, to “empty” the testes and so prevented them from exploding. Today this perception of masturbation would seem fantastic, bizarre and plain derisory, but it proved arresting for the impressionable minds of many pre-adolescent peers. The corollary experience for the female rarely was considered, although we thought there had to be something similar.

From a developmental perspective this assumed belief about masturbation was an ill-conceived way of describing probably a phase of the complex path of

It is not uncommon for an adult male to be ridiculed on account of his presumed inability to father children.

sexual maturation, albeit ignoring the consequences of a compulsive, habitual practice later in life.

The situation becomes complicated when an adolescent who converts to Catholicism, as I did, encounters the rigid conception of masturbation as an intrinsically disordered act, the equivalent of a grave sin. Whether in the church or among one's peers, the adolescent becomes burdened by an overlay of conflicting messages. In the absence of a frank and mature discussion of the meaning of human sexuality, neither the confessional (the standard forum for dealing with the practice of masturbation for many Catholics) nor received peer group knowledge can help to resolve the tension and the anxiety characteristic of later masturbatory sexual quandary for the adult male (or female).

Still on the issue of initiation rites in Africa, it also is worth mentioning that the post-circumcision period is usually a time when young initiates experiment with various forms of culturally sanctioned genital sexual activities. Some communities are known to allow a form of incest to young neophytes.

To come to the girl's path of sexual maturation, some African cultures continue to practice various forms of circumcision by vaginal infibulation or clitoridectomy. Literature abounds on the danger associated with such acts of female genital mutilation. Without delving into the physical aspects of this painful and harmful operation, the underlying rationale offers a peek into how some African cultures understand the path of sexual maturation for girls.

At the stage when the girl has her first menstrual period, she discovers, with the help of her mother and aunts, the cycle of fertility and the possibilities of conception and pregnancy. This learning process could occur in the context of pubertal rites or as a proximate preparation for marriage.

Because a girl's mother (and the other female figures in her immediate environment) has her direct and

personal experiences upon which to draw, the information she passes on to her daughter tends to be more accurate and practical. In this instance, the young woman is less likely to be misinformed by her peer group. This is in contradistinction to the experience of boys, who tend to grow up with little knowledge and a baggage of misconceptions regarding the biology of sex, human sexuality and conception. Again, the dearth of open inter-generational and cross-gender conversations in many African cultures about sex and sexuality does not allow for the dispelling of such misconceptions.

THE AGE OF PERFORMANCE VERSUS THE ART OF FERTILITY

At the time of marriage, the sexual performance of an African male assumes a status of high value. In the same novel, Achebe quotes an African proverb that says: "Never make an early morning appointment with a man who has just married a wife." He goes on to relate the practice of reserving the frothy dregs of palm-wine for the bridegroom in order to enhance his sexual performance:

At last the young man who was pouring out the wine held up half a horn of the thick, white dregs and said, "What we are eating is finished." "We have seen it," the others replied. "Who will drink the dregs?" he asked. "Whoever has a job at hand," said Idigo, looking at Nwakibie's elder son Igwelo with a malicious twinkle in his eye.

Everybody agreed that Igwelo should drink the dregs. He accepted the half-full horn from his brother and drank it. As Idigo had said, Igwelo had a job at hand because he had married his first wife a month or two before. The thick dregs of palm-wine were supposed to be good for men who were going into their wives (pp. 23-24).

Preoccupation with physical sexual performance is a function of sexual maturation for an African adult male. It can become a moment of anxiety for an adult who has traversed the path of psychosexual development predominantly on the wings of misconceptions and inaccurate information about human sexuality. The reason for this anxiety derives from the fact that his ability to sire offspring in the family and the community will determine to a large extent his position and status within these groups. It is not uncommon for an adult male to be ridiculed on account of his presumed inability to father children.

In a parallel sense, fertility is a function of sexual maturation for an adult female in Africa. To draw upon another example in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe mentions the practice of barren women and young wives sitting under a silk-cotton tree in the belief that the spirits that inhabit this tree will procure them children. If we take this along with another practice, where a live animal, usually a goat, is slaughtered in honor of a woman who has given birth to a succession of male children, it is easy to see the vital role that fecundity plays in the sexual maturation of an African woman. The anxiety that an adult male experiences at the time of marriage around issues of sexual performance finds correlation in the experience of an adult female. In many cultures, particularly those that still tolerate or practice polygamy, for good or for ill, her self-worth and status within her family of marriage depend largely on her ability to produce offspring.

However, unlike the adult male, the occasion of marriage offers the bride yet another opportunity to receive practical education relating to sex and sexuality within the context of marriage and childbearing.

THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

Halfway through his captivating novel, Achebe pens an intriguing flashback on the marital escapade of the principal characters of his story: the overbearing Okonkwo and his adoring second wife, Ekwezi:

As they stood there together, Ekwezi's mind went back to the days when they were young. She had married Anene because Okonkwo was too poor then to marry. Two years after her marriage to Anene, she could bear it no longer and she ran away to Okonkwo. It had been early in the morning. The moon was shining. She was going to the stream to fetch water. Okonkwo's house was on the way to the stream. She went in and knocked at his door and he came out. Even in those days he was not a man of many words. He just carried her into his bed and in the darkness began to feel around her waist for the loose end of her cloth (p. 103).

It often is alleged that Africans do not marry for love. Rather, love is a product of marriage. Is this the case of the proverbial chicken and the egg? Whatever value or meaning one assigns to love, the argument here is that marriage achieves validity and stability only when a married couple has achieved procreation.

“Validity” and “stability” then become the stimulus to love. This claim contains a deeper significance from the perspective of sexual maturation or psychosexual development in an African context.

Beyond the angst of performance and the anxiety of fertility and fecundity, for an African, the stage of procreation opens up the possibility of and opportunity for a successful resolution and integration of undigested messages and adversarial sexual energies accumulated over a long period of psychosexual development. Whether this can be recognized as an experience of love and friendship between two sexes whose paths of sexual maturation developed along separate lines remains open to interpretation. What can be said, though, is that in many African cultures, once a man and a woman have shown proof of procreation, they are entitled to a higher degree of esteem and then can look forward to a status of respectability as elders of the land. Thus, in the eye of the community, the attainment of respect bears the sign of a healthy and successful negotiation of the often-complex path of sexual maturation.

To conclude this short essay, the following points are worth reiterating. First, in attempting to offer a general description of the paths of sexual maturation that I consider recognizably African, I have drawn considerably on my own experiences. In that sense this description is limited because I come from a particular culture that cannot be said to be completely representative of all things African. Expectedly, the level of applicability varies from culture to culture. Yet I believe that what I have outlined above offers a perspective that would correlate well with many African situations. Second, I have deliberately avoided making a value judgment about these situations and practices. That is a matter for a separate discussion. Finally, much of what I have described above continues to undergo a radical transformation as the unrestrained access to outside cultural influences exposes African youth to myriad alternative paths of sexual maturation.



Father Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., Ph.D., teaches theology at Hekima College, the Jesuit School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya. He belongs to the North-West Africa Province of the Society of Jesus.

Coming Out Party

Valerie Schultz and Zoe Elizabeth Schultz



My second of four daughters, Zoe Elizabeth, is a twenty-one year-old art student. She also is a lesbian. She kindly agreed to write her thoughts on and experiences of growing up Catholic and gay. I hope that the following may shed a tender human light on a controversial topic that we as Catholics need to bring out of the darkness. Although my heart aches when I read what she has written, I also am proud of her resilience and strength and grateful for her willingness to share.

— Valerie Schultz

ZOE ELIZABETH SCHULTZ:

I'd thought Christmas would be the hardest part of it. My mother's quiet acceptance and hurt, my father's attempt in tripping me up on the guilt of having hurt her. I thought telling them "No" that Christmas, "No, I'm not going to mass," was the hardest "No" I'd ever tasted.

But the first Easter on my own hit me like I hadn't seen it coming. I remembered pastel eggs and candy overdose, little white shoes and lilies, and terror at the thought of eternity. Always, when I prayed, I prayed to God to make me right. I couldn't understand how any Creator could love me so much and create me so wrong.

I wasn't what He'd meant. I'd tried once to fix his mistake — myself. Like twins in one body, either at any moment but never the right one. I tried on smiles and said pretty, faithless words, trying so hard to make right by my choices. Falling short and landing a little further every time. I hated myself for what I was — for what He made me without leaving me a way out.

I'd attended youth group by parental force in high school, every time a guessing game for the others in how many ways a soul like mine could be damned. And every week I spoke less, angled my eyes a little farther down. I was quieter and quieter in my reactions until they weren't of any more fun to an antagonist — introverting until I was left alone, without a place among them.

I wanted them to see, to understand what they were doing to me. When you're told at a young age that classic rock could get you some serious time in purgatory, imagine what you'd think being gay would do to you.

I was a child in a dark-wood pew, beneath the sightless eyes of porcelain saints, and, like a lamb I was led to believe myself an abomination, subhuman and unworthy. I couldn't understand how any Creator could love me so much and create me so wrong. Free Will, said monsignor, but I hadn't been given a choice.

I STOPPED BELIEVING IN GOD

It was fear then — I sat in church, and I studied the faces around me. I dissected every reading and homily. I held my sisters' hands in prayer, and I stopped believing in God when that fear spread vines into my throat that twisted off my air every time someone gave name to my fear. It set roots into my rib cage every time I saw those rapt faces, those faithful, malicious worshippers who had stripped me of my place among them with their thoughtless judgments of things so much smaller than what my silence guarded. Their God wanted me to love Him and to fear Him. Respect and obey and believe. He left me no place among them.

I stopped believing in God when I knew how inherently wrong I was in His image. All powerful and all loving? If He existed He wouldn't have made this. Us. Me. His believers painted signs claiming, "He hates fags" even as He taught His love as unconditional. He gave me no chance for salvation, but a pick-your-poison: I could live my life as a lie, or I could live an honest sin.

The Catholic God I'd learned from my parents

When you're told at a young age that classic rock could get you some serious time in purgatory, imagine what you'd think being gay would do to you.

would not have doomed so many of His children from birth. A loving God could not have made this — and was lost to me. I was a faithless teenager with a secret fear without a name, terrified for: What Happens Now?

Finding my hand opening the closet door from the wrong side was a kick, and I'd been down. I was a girl in a small dark place behind a door that read "Lesbian" on its out-facing panel. I held my truth inside when it threatened to turn me wrong-side-out. I remembered searching stained-glass mazes for something to believe in — always losing the thread of it. Never finding my way out. I wouldn't let the people who loved me most know me at all.

But it was me — I was the one who couldn't love what I was, and all for a childhood fear planted by people who'd let me believe I'd burn for what I had no power over and couldn't change. For what I'd been made by their God's love.

MY FAMILY LOVED ME STILL

The hardest "No" I ever tasted was the "No" I gave that fear on my first Easter on my own. "No — I won't let you grow wild until you've buried me." For so long I'd nurtured a belief in my having been wrong-done from the get-go. My body was a battleground — riotous rights and misunderstood wrongs. And when I tore that fear from my soil, let my family have me for what I was, they loved me still, in spite of all we were taught as wrong. They made me. I am theirs, and their love is unconditional in a way I'd hoped for and never expected.

I am an ex-Catholic girl with no place in the church, grown into a woman who can admit she is a lesbian, still weeding out fears of self and eternity on good days; unafraid but still sometimes believing a God is out there mis-making His creations and punishing them for His own inherent wrongness.

A gay friend told me, right after my daughter came out, that parents are the most difficult of all to tell.

VALERIE SCHULTZ:

When a child comes out of the closet, sooner or later, parents have to come out, too.

There, that was easy. Almost as easy as the March day two years ago when my daughter, home from college for spring break, sat in the backyard watching the hummingbirds dive and feed in their tiny stopwatch frenzy, and said, "Mom, I'm gay."

I imagine that was the hardest thing she'd ever done, and that she'd practiced how to say it, how to couch it, how to bring it up. I imagine that she'd tried on different parental responses, as well:

"WHAT? Leave this house!"

Or, "Oh, honey, I'm happy today, too."

Or, uncontrollable, wordless sobbing, ending in a dead faint.

Actually, I believe I asked a few careful questions: "How long have you known this? Are you in a relationship?" I needed some facts to help me process this new information. I had not seen this coming.

SHE HAD CARRIED HER CROSS IN SILENCE

She had known it for six or seven years, long, difficult years of hiding in a small, conservative town. She was "out" at school in Santa Cruz, a more progressive city whose name means Holy Cross. She had carried her own heavy cross in silence all that time.

She was not committed to anyone, she said, but had gone on several dates with different women. Then she gave me a book called, *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, edited by Jeffrey Siker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

As I read the various essays, I alternately was enlightened and appalled by what others had to say. While the book does not speak exclusively from the point of view of the Catholic Church, it draws on Christian heritage and Christian horizons. It was food for thought; indeed, during those first days, it was sus-

tenance, as were the writings of John J. McNeill, a psychotherapist and teacher.

Although raised in a Catholic home, my daughter had stopped going to church a year before she left for college, not long after being confirmed, as many teenagers do. She rejected the hypocrisy and the prejudice and the injustice that she witnessed in the Catholic Church, especially as the abusive priest scandals came to a boil around us all.

MY DAUGHTER'S SENSITIVITY AND LOVE

She stopped using the sign of the cross at grace before meals. But she still knew enough about Catholicism to grasp that, for her mother, being a practicing Catholic and the parent of a lesbian would be a sticky balancing act at best. She also knew her mother well enough to understand that the road to acceptance and peace would best be followed through the gift of the right books. I am grateful for and awed by my daughter's sensitivity and love. And I persist in believing that I can love and honor both my daughter and the message of Jesus Christ.

I recently heard my daughter tell a friend that when she told me she was a lesbian, I said, "That's nice, sweetie, can you pass the salt?" Not literally true, but a telling image. I think that was her way of communicating that I did all right.

A gay friend told me, right after my daughter came out, that parents are the most difficult of all to tell. That you fear their rejection more than anyone else's. That usually you put off telling them until last, until you really have no choice because by now everyone else knows. My friend told me I should feel proud that my daughter felt safe to tell me before most others. But I still feel I failed her by not figuring it out for myself.

Her father, my husband, to whom she came out next, told me that he was not surprised. He is an educator by profession and felt there had been signs of our daughter's orientation. I, on the other hand, was oblivious. I had no idea. One of my first questions to her, God forgive me, was whether this might be some sort of phase. A phase! After all the self-torture and self-searching she had been through, what a loathsome thing to be asked by her own mother. Did I think she was suddenly a trend-follower?

ACCEPTING MY DAUGHTER AS GAY

Had I gone through a phase of lesbianism while

growing up? Had other women I had known? I don't think so. I always have known I am straight, just as I always have known I am left-handed, or redhead. These are not choices I made, but how I turned up here on this green earth: God made me straight, and gave me recessive genes.

And I totally accept that God created my daughter gay, just as God created her artistic and tall and witty. I don't accept that God messed up on her creation, that she is wrongly made, or broken.

The problem in coming out as a parent is that not every adult I know sees homosexuality in the same light that I do. Some, especially those of a certain fundamentalist bent, see it as sinful, as an aberrant choice on a par with perversions such as necrophilia and bestiality and child molestation, or as a self-indulgent lark from which one can return home.

This shocks me when I compare these summary judgments with the committed, loving, gay people I know. It offends me when I realize that there are people who insultingly equate my daughter with a pedophile, or with someone who has sex with dogs or dead bodies. It scares me to know that there are those who don't even know my daughter, but who wish her ill or eternal damnation because she is a lesbian.

When your daughter comes out, you suddenly think less about the inanimate "issue" of homosexuality and more about the flesh-and-blood reality of your lesbian daughter's life. You grasp how your child truly has suffered in coming of age, in the coming-out process, and you regret your own cluelessness. At least, I do.

I BEGAN TO SPEAK UP

I know I began to puzzle over our society's, as well as my church's, mixed messages on inclusion, homophobia, diversity and controversy and humanity and spirituality. I read a lot. I reflected. I began to speak up.

Along the road I have encountered many companions: pain, discernment, dialogue, confusion, reconciliation, controversy, nuance and complexity. And transformation. And grace.

The more I became involved, embroiled in some ways, the more I was able to work through my own feelings of mourning for my unconscious expectations for my daughter's adulthood (marriage to a nice man and redhaired grandbabies), as well as my feelings of fear for her future safety and happiness. I cannot imagine what her future will hold, or who her family will be. We par-

ents have expectations and fears for all of our children, but our gay children force us to face them and examine them and transcend them. Which sometimes turns out to be a service to our straight children, as well.

My daughter is lovely, sensitive, intelligent, compassionate, talented, blessed and gay. She, and all of our gay children, are not second class in any way. They deserve every bit of our love and our support. Even if we lose some friends, or our good standing in our churches, in the process.

Right now I am not a comfortable Catholic. Some of my church's hierarchy and proclamations and actions cause me pain and, sometimes, shame. I look at other churches and try to imagine switching my affiliation, but I know that I am home.

"Lord, to whom can we go?" Peter asked, when Jesus asked the disciples if they wanted to leave Him. "You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-9). I know how he felt. Because within this church of Jesus Christ, this Catholic Church, I am a believer in a God who is Love.

I believe there is room in the Catholic Church for all the beloved: I believe that is the promise of the Holy One of God. I am struggling. But I'm not leaving. I believe God is calling me, to honesty and to justice and to love. I believe God is calling my daughter, too. I'm just hoping that she can hear above the hate-filled din of some so-called Christian followers.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Perito, J.E., M.D. *Contemporary Catholic Sexuality*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003.

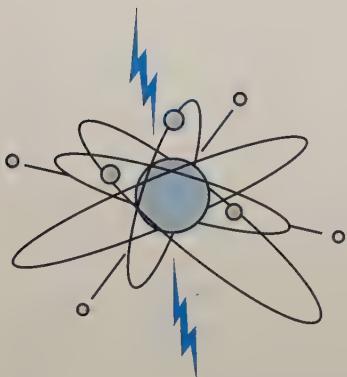
To read the Catholic Rainbow Parents Declaration, "a pastoral statement of wisdom, love and support from Minnesota parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons," please type in Catholic Rainbow Parents Declaration on the Internet.



Zoe Elizabeth Schultz, left, is a photography major at the University of California at Santa Cruz, California. Valerie Schultz, her mother, is a writer in Tehachapi, California.

Understanding *Infatuation* and Devotion

Monica Applewhite, Ph.D.



Many times over the years I have seen otherwise smart, grounded people make extraordinarily poor decisions while in the throes of infatuation. Each time I have wondered how it is that as a society we can be so fascinated by all that is sexual and still know so little about human attraction, falling in love and maintaining relationships. If we knew more about the study of love, could that make a difference in how we make decisions in our relationships? Let's find out.

INFATUATION

Infatuation has many names in our culture, demonstrating that it has great value in Western society. Chemistry, a spark, obsession, romantic love, these all are names for the phenomenon described in the psychological world as "Passionate Love." Passionate Love is defined as "an intense longing for union with another" and is characterized by feelings of excitement, preoccupation, idealization, sexual attraction, intensity and elation. Passionate love often is described as a "high;" some people say it is a "spiritual high." Individuals who are experiencing this type of relationship often feel completely consumed by it. They may find it difficult to concentrate on anything else. The desire to be with the other person, to be in physical contact, to hear the voice of the person is extremely pow-

erful. Overall, physical and sexual attraction during infatuation experiences is highly compelling. In short, passionate love is INTENSE.

Studies of persons experiencing infatuation report that the normal duration of infatuation ranges from six weeks to six months, depending upon the characteristics and the circumstances of the relationship. Interestingly enough, these same studies show that we can be infatuated with almost anyone as long as they are new to us.

DEVOTION

Devotion also is known by a variety of names, such as commitment, “true” love, and agape (being in a state of wonder). Psychologists most often use the term, “Companionate Love.” Companionate Love is defined as “the affection we hold for those with whom our lives are deeply entwined,” and it is characterized by a feeling of being profoundly known and understood. Companionate love is comfortable, mutual and relatively consistent. Those who experience companionate love often share history, have similar values and consider each other “soul mates.” Individuals who are experiencing companionate love enjoy physical closeness, “inside jokes” and special nicknames. Studies of this form of love indicate that while there seems to be no limit to the number of years one can sustain companionate love, it rarely is experienced in less than a year of knowing the person well.

SUSTAINING INFATUATION

So why do humans become infatuated? And why do some relationships deepen into devotion while others fizzle into indifference? Let’s take the infatuation question first.

The instinct to procreate is embedded deeply into our psyche. This instinct manifests itself in the tendency to feel attraction toward “someone new.” A person is experienced as “new” when we are unable to know their thoughts, understand them and, most importantly, predict their behavior. Two people who do not know each other well, or who know each other socially, but not intimately, are not able to predict one another’s behavior, and this lack of predictability sustains the infatuation, or passionate love between them. This unpredictability is why passionate love often is sustained and increased by experiences in the relationship

Those who experience companionate love often share history, have similar values and consider each other “soul mates.”

that are intense and exciting, regardless of whether they are positive or negative experiences. So it is possible for chaos, fear, secrecy and anger to increase and sustain infatuation, just as unexpected time together, surprise gifts and other types of positive spontaneity can.

Being able to predict the behavior of the other person, rather than negative experiences, normally is what decreases the intense excitement of infatuation. For some, being able to predict unwanted or unpleasant behavior decreases the infatuation rather quickly, but even being able to predict desired behaviors, such as good manners, good grooming, thoughtfulness or interest in the partner’s opinions ultimately decreases the initial intensity of the new relationship.

SUSTAINING DEVOTION

Companionate love, however, is dependent upon positive, consistent experiences for sustenance. Recall that companionate love (devotion) is characterized by the feeling of being profoundly known, deeply understood and accepted. Studies of companionate love have identified five components of the devoted long-term relationships: commitment, intimacy, cohesion, interaction and attention. Each of these components serves to maintain the consistency of a relationship, allowing those involved to deepen trust and increase appreciation for the other person.

COMMITMENT

The first component of sustained companionate love relationships is commitment. Commitment can be achieved over time, solidified by a dramatic event or

So how does one achieve intimacy? Intimacy exists on three levels: cognitive, emotional and behavioral.

brought to the relationship because of societal expectations. Commitment is the disposition or plan to stay in the relationship during the more difficult times. It is pretending as if there are no other options but to maintain the relationship. In societies that arrange marriages, spouses are selected by parents and other family members based on similarities of the families, similar status and levels of attractiveness, having the same religious beliefs and other practical matters for the families to blend easily together. Ironically, these same criteria are strong predictors for long-term marital satisfaction in the United States, but rarely do they enter into the decision-making of those who are making plans while they are experiencing infatuation. In arranged marriages, the commitment is immediate. The long-term decision to remain in the relationship is made prior to the ceremony. When there are difficulties in the relationship, the option of "just leaving" rarely enters into the realm of possibility.

In the United States, commitment is not imposed by the larger society, though it may be expected by a smaller community or by a family. All close relationships experience some ebb and flow of comfort and discomfort. Commitment allows us to weather the variations in intensity of feelings, the attractions to other people and the day-to-day work of sustaining a relationship. Commitment leads to consistency and trust.

INTIMACY

Recall that we develop devotion, or companionate love through consistent, positive experiences. A key positive experience in most companionate love relationships is the sharing of intimacy. Intimacy is from the Latin, meaning "inner" or "innermost." When we feel

intimate with another person, we believe that we can reveal our innermost thoughts and feelings and that we will be safe. Intimacy can exist in many types of relationships, not just romantic relationships: Friends, siblings, relatives and work colleagues may share intimacy. When intimacy is absent, in Western society we experience that as "loneliness," the feeling that we have no one with whom we can share our innermost thoughts and feelings. Most experts in the field agree that emotionally healthy adults must have at least one to three people with whom they share intimacy in order to sustain happiness and life satisfaction over time.

So how does one achieve intimacy? Intimacy exists on three levels: cognitive, emotional and behavioral.

Cognitive intimacy means sharing one's history, thoughts, beliefs, hopes and fears, and listening to the history, thoughts, beliefs, hopes and fears of others. Either not revealing information about oneself or not listening to the information shared by the other person will inhibit the development of intimacy. Risking too much information too soon, however, can frighten someone who feels unprepared to share at a comparable level.

Emotional intimacy is deep caring for another person and knowing that person can hurt us. Because we care so earnestly, when the other person is sad or ill or in harm's way, we care, we worry. What happens to the other person is of the utmost importance to us. We also know that a negative word or expression from our intimate can send us into a tailspin. This is the enormous risk of intimacy and the terrible pain of dissolving an intimate relationship. Seemingly, nothing means more to us than praise from our intimates, and nothing grips us more immediately and stays with us longer than harsh words or criticism from those we have trusted with intimacy.

Behavioral intimacy is spending time together. In order to achieve intimacy, one must spend time with the other person. Once intimacy is established, less time is needed to sustain it, but ongoing interaction always is needed to sustain the feeling of being understood and accepted.

COHESION

The third component of sustained relationships is cohesion. It is the product of intimacy. Cohesion is a feeling of closeness and compassion for the other person. Cohesion is what prevents us from hurting the other person, even though we have the power to do so.

Cohesion is a desire to care for, protect and nurture another person. It is a connectedness to another person's experience that is so strong one is willing to make sacrifices and expend energy to protect the interests of the other person.

INTERACTION

The next component of sustained, companionate love relationships is interaction: sharing activities. Mutual interests, sharing leisure time, enjoying the same hobbies contribute to interaction. Studies of communication patterns show that this component is important particularly to males of all ages. These studies show that both boys and men are more likely to "open up" or share information in the context of a shared activity, such as fishing, golfing, walking or playing a game, than they are in a "sit-down" setting that would be comfortable for girls or women to talk. The more activities we share, the more time we have to increase intimacy.

ATTENTION

The last component of sustained companionate love is attention. Attention refers to the positive thoughts and planning that lead to behavior that is considerate and kind to the other person. This is the component that most clearly demonstrates, over time, the respect and high regard one has for the other. Attention is how we demonstrate that we value the person and the relationship. When we take time to prepare a favorite meal, "fix up" or display a beloved possession, or write a special note we show special attention. When we use a kind voice tone, avoid criticizing, take time to ask questions and listen, help with tasks and find ways to make the other person's life easier, we show the type of daily attention that is essential for satisfaction in long-term relationships.

THE COEXISTENCE OF INFATUATION AND INTIMACY

So far we have described how infatuation or passionate love occurs and is sustained, and we have discussed how devotion or companionate love is sustained, but are the two mutually exclusive? Can we be in a consuming, passionate relationship and still have intimacy? Let us examine that question.

To be and feel deeply and profoundly known, one

The more activities we share, the more time we have to increase intimacy.

must share personal information and time and risk being hurt. Naturally, we avoid painful experiences; hence, we usually do not reveal information about ourselves until we feel safe — until we have confidence that the information will not be used against us. Most of us do not feel safe until we feel we can predict how the other person will react and what the other person will do with the information, e.g., tell other people and criticize us, or maintain confidentiality and respond with compassion. In other words, we reveal our innermost thoughts and feelings when we believe we can predict the other person's behavior. Just ask yourself this question, "When did I last reveal private information about myself to a person whose behaviors I cannot understand or predict at all?" It probably has been a while since that happened.

But there are relationships in which individuals experience extraordinary intimacy within passionate love relationships. How can that be?

In these cases, the intensity of experience that is needed to sustain the infatuation is fueled by the characteristics of the relationship itself. A typical scenario of this type would be a "forbidden" relationship, such as an affair with a married person, an office relationship that is against policy, a relationship between a therapist and a client or any other type of relationship in which secrecy must be maintained, fear of being caught is constant and time together is intermittent.

It is not uncommon for individuals who are part of "forbidden" relationships to be unaware of the effect that the nature of the relationship is having on the perception of intensity of feelings toward the other person, and to believe that they feel so strongly "in spite of" the difficulties surrounding the relationship. It has been quite a shock for some who have left a marriage

A higher level of excitement in the early days and weeks of a relationship is not a good predictor of future satisfaction, commitment or devotion.

or a job or celibate life to enter a now "condoned" relationship with someone and to find that the other suddenly did not seem as exciting or as flawless as that person did before the relationship changed.

There also are those who search all their lives for the "perfect partner" with whom they can share the deepest mutual understanding and sustain the level of intensity of physical attraction that exists prior to the existence of strong intimacy. Each time that familiarity and consistency lead to greater intimacy and an associated decrease in intensity, they feel disappointed that once again they have "fallen out of love." Studies of this phenomenon show high levels of desire for excitement and intimacy and high levels of loneliness that are all remarkably consistent over the lifetime.

CONCLUSION

Any of us can become infatuated with someone new. It is part of us. Infatuation itself is not a "wrong" or dangerous experience. When we understand this dimension of ourselves, we can be energized by it and enjoy the temporary "high" of the experience, knowing that our perceptions will be colored for a time by the feelings of infatuation and the excitement associated with it. It also is true that most companionate love relationships begin with infatuation and through consistent, positive experiences, deepen into devotion. The danger comes when we believe that the experience of infatuation is synonymous with "falling in love" and associate a decrease in intensity with a decrease in love. A higher level of excitement in the early days and weeks of a relationship is not a good predictor of future satisfaction, commitment or devotion. While most sustained companionate relationships begin with intensity and a

feeling that the relationship truly is special and "meant to be," many other relationships begin in the same way and within weeks move into disinterest and apathy.

We began with a question: Would a deeper understanding of attraction and falling in love change behavior? Could insight into infatuation influence fidelity? Would understanding passion affect how we keep our vows? Our promises? I am not convinced that more information would change behavior for everyone, but I do believe this knowledge base is worth pursuing and that it is essential for a basic understanding of human motivation and choices.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Hatfield, E. and R. Rapson. *Love, Sex and Intimacy: Their Psychology, Biology and History*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1997.

Rawlins, W. *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992.

Sternberg, R.J. and M. L. Barnes, Eds. *The Psychology of Love*. New Haven, Connecticut, and London: Yale University Press, 1989.

Vaughan, D. *Uncoupling: Turning Points in Intimate Relationships*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.



Monica Applewhite, Ph.D., President of Praesidium Religious Services, has spent the past fifteen years working with organizations that serve children to prevent incidents and false allegations of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Evangelization from the Inside Out: Bringing Faith to the Young

Thomas C. Fox



My former positions at the *National Catholic Reporter*, as editor for seventeen years (1980-1997) and publisher for eight (1997-2005), allowed me countless hours to ponder the Catholic Church. I've found many U.S. Catholics, especially those who have given so much of their lives to church renewal since the Second Vatican Council, discouraged. Others, who have faithfully raised their children as Catholics, but who have participated less directly in the struggle to keep their church engaged in "the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted," as the council directed us, also have caught the discouragement bug.

In the midst of so many sagging spirits remains the question: How do we pass on the faith to our children? No easy answers have emerged. Parents, it seems, like so many others in our church, generally fall into the "retrenchment" and "engagement" models. In this essay I offer a middle-ground approach, one that does not retreat from the world as it attempts to reach the wider human family with Catholic essentials, recast to meet the needs of the times. In my opinion, the next phase of Catholic renewal involves a return to basic teachings, but teachings shaped in language and symbols that

Without sharing the human struggle in the world we will not know the language or have the credibility to reach the young.

make sense in the twenty-first century. We need to become more effective evangelizers to the younger generation. The good news is we have the tools at hand to strengthen our efforts. I will briefly outline these tools, but first I will set the stage by offering some context.

Why are these times so difficult for Catholic evangelization? Let me point to two overarching reasons. The first is the inability of societies to integrate rapid change. The cacophony of instant communication through electronic and satellite technology; the speed of global commerce; the sophistication of marketing techniques, using sex and individual fulfillment as primary props; survival pressures, and forced movements for job gains all have conspired to loosen societal anchors once rooted in family and community. The second reason is more internal. Within the Catholic Church, forty years after the council, there seems to be little consensus as to what effective evangelization might look like. Divisions are well documented and exist to the highest levels of the institutional church.

TWO MODELS OF EVANGELIZATION

To make the point, allow me to recall the synod on Asia in 1998, which I attended and on which I reported. Over four weeks it became clear that two models of evangelization now coincide within our church. One is the model of proclamation: preaching that Jesus is the universal savior to the world. This model was upheld at the synod by all the bishops from the Vatican. The other was the model of witness, which was upheld by virtually all the Asian bishops attending the synod. Aspects of this division continue to play themselves out in a great deal of church life. The former takes a "City

of God" and "City of Man" approach to the world, seeing the church as a light set aside from the darker world. The latter sees the church within the world, interacting with it in a give-and-take, as a leaven to the people of God. These models take many shapes and fuel numerous debates within our church today. Somehow, resolution eludes us and diminishes our evangelical efforts.

Here I will state my clear preference. In my opinion, we, the church, have no choice but to enter and interact with our hurting world. I believe that the gospels compel us to do so. Without sharing the human struggle in the world we will not know the language or have the credibility to reach the young. Without being part of the world we will not learn from it; we will not adequately share its hopes and its pain. We need to drink, eat, dance, work and pray as the wider human family does. Another danger of maintaining a church/world duality is to see life in black-and-white absolutes. The "City of God, City of Man" model not only falls into the temptation of seeing the world as debased and evil, but it also often embraces the church as pure and perfect. When this occurs, honest self-evaluation falls prey to a type of idolatry that places the church on the altar of worship rather than maintaining it rightfully as solely a means to God and transformational behavior.

EVANGELIZATION TOOLS

We Catholic ministers — yes, journalism is ministry — have excellent tools at our disposal to reach the spiritually and physically needy of the world. Let me briefly touch on a few. Here we can go to the fundamentals of our Catholic faith.

Our starting point is our belief in a Trinitarian God. We profess belief in a relational Being. The Trinity exceeds finite thought and suggests that God's essence is relational and perhaps even evolving. It suggests that it is in relationships that we might better come to experience the divine, if we open ourselves and our relationships humbly to God. Catholicism is fundamentally a communal faith, seeming to suggest, once again, that our ego-self is, at best, temporal, while pointing to the need to get beyond self-identity and enter a deeper and more profound state of shared Being. I suggest here that we need to remind ourselves that our faith is mystical and that mysticism is a practice we need to

develop and practice — and preach. Reason can raise the questions but will fall short with the answers. The young intuitively sense this. That's why so many say they are "spiritual but not religious." Mysticism is our first evangelical tool.

BELIEF IN AN INCARNATIONAL GOD

We profess a belief in an Incarnational God. This means body and spirit are not two, but one, not opposed to each other, but part of each other, celebrating and fulfilling each other. Our flesh is sacred. We must preach the needs of our bodies — nourishment, food, health, water and intimacy — sacred signs of God's life in our lives. Our bodies are instruments in a divine spiritual journey. When we say we are part of the Body of Christ, we profess an essential spiritual bond, implicitly saying we are living spirits with bodies and not simply bodies containing souls. Again, this is an invitation to celebrate our bodies, to see them in the most positive of lights, even as we inhabit them and through them attempt to break through ego identification and step into a deeper state of being through forms of meditation and prayer. In the process we will come to understand better the meaning of our lives, the love in which we are wrapped, while entering more deeply into the energizing and directional state of shared being.

We profess a belief in the nonviolent Jesus. In a world so much in conflict, we need to reaffirm Jesus' message of nonviolence. I can't remember the last time I heard a homily in church on the nonviolent Jesus. Nonviolence rests at the core of our Christian tradition but has been buried by accommodations to state and national needs to such an extent that Jesus has been lost. It is a telling state of affairs that the concept of nonviolence is viewed with grave suspicion in America. The word almost is subversive. Maybe that's the way it should be, subversive, just as Christianity should be subversive. The message of Jesus is a message of nonviolence and all-embracing love and forgiveness. Were we to preach nonviolence both as a divine truth and as a path for coexistence and harmony in a tortuously militarized world, the young will listen. Nonviolence should be our Christian mantra.

BELIEF IN THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

We profess a belief in the Paschal mystery. This is

The message of Jesus is a message of nonviolence and all-embracing love and forgiveness.

the mystery — and observable fact in nature — that life, death and rebirth are the basic elements of the life story, as well as the larger unfolding story of the universe, being told in the life and death of stars and the evolution of the universe. The Paschal process is everywhere around us, and each garden a mini-manifestation of God's plan for us and of Jesus' life, death and resurrection story two millennia ago. The Paschal mystery, then, is an affirmation of a core truth. The Paschal mystery is a doorway connecting faith, nature and science. It is, then, an effective tool for connecting with those who might otherwise not quickly sense the seamlessness of faith and reason.

We profess a sacramental view of the world. The mystics have been there through the ages. It is very much part of the Catholic psyche and is encapsulated in the seven sacraments that open windows on the divine. It is the view that life is sacred; indeed, that creation, coming from the hand of God, shares in God's infinite sacredness. Matter is not simply soul-less mass. It is made up of molecules infused with spirit through time. This growing awareness of the sacred can be seen in the journeys of countless young people who seek the spirit even as they eschew religious traditions. Many young seekers turn from the Catholic Church, failing to comprehend the awesome scope of its sense of the sacred. The emergence and recent popularity of Creation Spirituality is a sign we are moving in the right direction. Much more is required. One problem we have is that we profess only seven church sacraments. These might be our church's official sacraments — passages and signs connecting the natural and the

When justice becomes the primary mission of our church, all the rest follows more credibly.

divine — but hardly represent the fullness of our Catholic sacramental vision of reality. I like to say there are more sacraments than we can imagine and that we participate in a sacrament each time we make the link in mind and action between our ordinary lives and the love of God that surrounds us. Any object or act that guides us into deep meaning, any material sign that opens us to God and God's infinite compassion, is a sacrament.

A WORLD OF DIVINE OPPORTUNITY

Further, we might open ourselves more publicly to the sacraments of others "outside" the church. Consider it a form of inter-religious, or inter-spiritual, dialogue. Accept that we live in a world of divine opportunity and that we always are being led deeper into insight if we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit. When I hear Catholic parents lamenting that their children have abandoned the faith, I often ask if they feel that they, as parents, successfully have passed core Christian values on to their offspring. More often than not, the answer is a resounding "yes." I suggest to these parents that they might not yet be Catholic enough. To be Catholic, of course means to be universal, open and inclusive. It means to be in conversation with others, guided by love while always seeking deeper spiritual insight.

Finally, and hardly least, we profess to be the People of God, the sons and the daughters of God, brothers and sisters in the family of humanity. When Sister of Mercy Theresa Kane speaks, she often asks her audience: "How large is your community?" She

takes answers until she finally hears the one she's seeking: "The entire human family." There are no national boundaries in our Catholic theology, despite what you might have been told. Our family is inclusive. We all are invited to the Eucharist. We all are called to share the resources of the planet. Yet one-third of this family ekes out existence on one dollar a day; one-third lives minimally on two dollars a day; the rest of us live in unparalleled abundance. These divisions are growing and represent the fundamental moral outrage of our times. When justice becomes the primary mission of our church, all the rest follows more credibly. Jesus' message of liberation was never an ethereal one. It was full liberation of mind, body and soul. "Set the captives free," we are told. The Asian bishops speak of integral liberation. Our common sacrament of nourishment — the Eucharist — is not accidentally made up of bread. When feeding the world takes on a passion within our lives unparalleled by all others, we finally will be the evangelists we are called to become.

CONVERSATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Let me repeat: We need to listen to and learn more from our so-called "wayward" young. When we do, we open paths for creative dialogue critical for spiritual sharing. Each of our voices, after all, is finite and catches just glimpses of the deep mysteries of creation. Maybe this is a call for a dose of church humility and a willingness to be open to other spiritual seekers. Maybe we need to coin a new term to be added to the lexicons of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. Allow me to offer "inter-spiritual dialogue." Developed thoughtfully, it could open up wide new vistas of sharing with our children and grandchildren, especially those whom we might view as "unchurched," but who certainly would qualify as spiritual-seekers. If we communicate with the young, if we allow ourselves to share, even if only to sit in silence and prayer, as we each practice our new sharing, we will be doing the work of the Spirit. Let the Spirit worry about the results. Lest I sound too unstructured, allow me to affirm that our Catholic faith is a reasoned faith. As Catholics, we celebrate our minds and our ability to reason, to build theologies that help us understand God's and our place in the universe. However, I caution that we have a need for humility. Reason can direct us to, but not necessarily settle, the mysteries of life beyond us. Theology, then, should not become a

lusive tool. Rather, it should be pursued generously and openly and with respect for different views.

MINISTERS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

I have traveled widely over the years. I've met with countless Catholics and heard many of their stories. I find a virtually universal need for encouragement. People need affirmation and are not receiving enough of it. This serious shortcoming should send us a message. We need ministers of encouragement. This shortcoming also provides an opening for evangelists. Nothing is more encouraging, more comforting, than to hear the message of God's unending love. The Christian message, after all, begins and ends with the command to live and preach love.

More than anything else, people seek and need affirmation and confirmation in their lives. Only rare persons are so certain of themselves that they can live without affirmation. There is simple affirmation: "The work you do is good and helpful." "You are a great parent." "I understand it is difficult, but keep going." "What a lovely smile you have." "You inspire me in ways you will never know." "You are making a difference. Don't stop." The list goes on. Each of these smaller affirmations is part of a web of larger affirmation that is carved out of the belief that life has meaning, that each of us is loved and forgiven. Sharing this gospel message is the deeper and more fundamental act of encouragement. The late Father John Egan of Chicago once told me that encouragement is a gift that costs nothing and is deeply appreciated, but that not enough people seem to give it. I remember Father Egan at board meetings of the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company saying, "You guys do such good work. It's hard for me to find anything to criticize." The point is not that the *National Catholic Reporter* was without fault; rather, it is that Egan knew the value of encouragement and saw it as a gift he could bring to the meetings.

LOVED AND FORGIVEN

When I go out to give a talk, I think of Egan and his insights. So I often begin by reminding my audiences, often to their surprise, that they are loved and forgiven. I sometimes ask these Catholics to recall a parent or parents who love or loved them unconditionally. I ask them to sit in silence and savor the thought

More than anything else, people seek and need affirmation and confirmation in their lives.

that turns to feeling. I then ask them to remember those precious feelings as they continue through the day. Before continuing with my talk, I finally ask them to ponder where that love originates, tracing it back to its beginning. The love they feel for a parent or a child, I suggest, is a small fraction of the love God has for them. This message of love, I'm afraid, is a message many simply don't hear often enough. Yet it is the central message of our Christian faith and the core message of Christian evangelization.

And, surely, wrapped with the confidence of God's love, they need to know and to feel that their sins, or what they consider to be their human imperfections, are long forgiven. In a way, I find myself offering absolution or maybe more technically reminding them of what is involved in Infinite Love. Preaching forgiveness is also a way of spreading encouragement and hope. With forgiveness comes renewed personal energy. I tell audiences that their sins were forgiven from all time — even before they committed them. I encourage them to focus less on sin and more on the wonder and love of God. And I have shocked my audiences more than once by ending my remarks by saying, "Go now and sin some more!" My point is not to encourage any breach of the commandments. It is, rather, to preach that each person who feels consciously wrapped in God's love becomes imprisoned by it — and less likely to be inclined toward sin.

DIFFERENT CATHOLICS; DIFFERENT NEEDS; ONE MISSION

Catholics can be divided largely into two groups. In my experiences, I have found the over-fifty crowd lives

The successes of World Youth Day affirm that the young are hungry for spirituality and religion when the message gets stripped to the core.

with unreasonable guilt. This guilt stems from Catholic childhood when they lived under a judgmental God. Today it manifests itself through personal perceptions that somehow they have let God down by not living up to sometimes self-imposed expectations. Their brokenness can be lonely and is not readily shared. These Catholics need to hear they are forgiven, that even though they feel they have somehow failed, their God loves them as they are. Indeed, God embraces them in all they are and do.

The second group of Catholics is those generally under fifty. They never experienced the “authoritarian God” who reigned before Vatican II. This group was raised in the turmoil that followed the council, a time of transformation within a vortex of epic transition in the wider world. These Catholics experienced few of the age-old social anchors that faded in the second half of the twentieth century as migrations increased, communication gained exponentially and the power of advertising and commercialism took hold and spread. It was in the past three decades that the Madison Avenue and Hollywood executives realized that sex sells. Marketers realized they could find virtually endless ways to feed and play off individual insecurity. Under increased financial, commercial and marketing pressures, marriages broke up in record numbers, and youngsters often had to fend for themselves. Insecurity is the hallmark of the “under fifty” generation. Again, if older Catholics need to be told they are forgiven, younger Catholics simply need to be told they are good, lovable and loved.

There it is: forgiveness and love, the twin pillars of Christian evangelization. It is between these pillars

that we stand the best chance of successful evangelization. It is here, in basic Christian form, that the Catholic Church will best reach the young. The successes of World Youth Day affirm that the young are hungry for spirituality and religion when the message gets stripped to the core. The problem for Catholic evangelizers is that our church’s message of love too often seems subsumed in a message of “life.” By this I mean that we have lost priorities and have made biological and sexual ethics our church’s lynchpin trademarks. There should be no separation between a pro-love and a pro-life Christianity, but far too often there is. Odd that this should be.

CELEBRATING THE HUMAN BODY

More than anywhere else, it is in the Incarnation that Christians find the mystical connection between God’s love and our sexuality. In the Incarnation, spirit meets human flesh; the Word comes into existence as we experience life, including its spiritual, psychological and physical longings. Christians, above all, should celebrate the human body. Yet many Catholics and others continue to have negative and even shameful notions about our bodies. This is changing slowly. But the process is not helped by the superficial and commercial idolatry of the body propagated by the commercial West. We need new theologies of sexuality that will draw us into a greater sense of its sacred place, while building upon recent psychological insights that can help our church expand its understanding of the natural order. That we are made in God’s image should tell us that the erotic and creative forces of healthy sexuality, male and female within each of us, male to female, and female to male, are just a taste, foreplay if you will, in a divine creation plan calling all of us to astonishing wonder and unimaginable unity in God.

CHANGING CHURCH ATTITUDE ON SEX

Some of our church’s official negativity regarding sex has begun to erode in recent decades. One historic breakthrough occurred at Vatican II. For the first time marital sex was dignified, and conjugal pleasure was blessed and depicted as enhancing mutual respect and love, not merely contributing to the continuation of the human race. The breakthrough came with the promulgation of the council document, *The Church in the Modern World*. This is what it said about full sexual sharing:

Such love, merging the human with the divine, leads the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift proving itself by gentle affection and by deed. Such love pervades the whole of their lives. Indeed, by its generous activity it grows better and grows greater ...

This love is uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act. The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones. Expressed in a manner which is truly human, these actions signify and promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a thankful will.

Some years back I wrote a book entitled, *Sexuality and Catholicism* (George Braziller). What I discovered in writing the book was that Jesus said virtually nothing about sex. He reached out to women, listened to them, felt comfortable among them and respected them. He revealed himself in the Resurrection first to women and told them to spread the word. I also learned our Catholic ideas on sex have little to do with the gospels and a lot to do with a debilitating Hellenistic dualism that divided body and soul. I learned that our church's attitudes on women are rooted in ancient cultures and thought that denied women souls, saw them as inferior beings and viewed their bodily fluids as visible signs of God's displeasure.

THE WRITINGS OF AUGUSTINE

Saint Augustine, writing in the early fifth century, contributed a lot to Christianity, but he didn't serve us adequately in the area of sexuality. Instead, he reflected some of the thinking of his times, eventually teaching that human desires are disordered. It was largely in response to the Manicheans that Augustine reaffirmed a belief in the general goodness of marriage and procreation. Sexual intercourse, however, without procreative purpose, was, he thought, a serious sin. The only sinless sexual union he could imagine was one intended for procreation.

Augustine's writings were extensive, and many focused on human sexuality. He devoted a chapter in *The City of God* to attempting to show that before the fall in the Garden of Eden, Adam was able fully to control his sexual urges. With the fall, that ability ended. Augustine could not fathom the notion of sexual pleasure in Eden, not when Adam and Eve were in their pre-fall state.

The Catholic tradition has insisted that its moral teaching is based primarily on natural law and not primarily on faith or scripture.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, writing in the thirteenth century, departed from the Augustinian tendency to suspect all pleasure, viewing pleasure as natural insofar as it was governed by reason. For centuries, Roman Catholic thought was influenced heavily by Thomism and Scholasticism. Scholastic thought considers human reason the key to unraveling the mystery of the divine. It paints orderly relationships between the supernatural and the natural worlds, showing how they relate to each other and interact. Closely associated with this approach to theological pursuit has been the natural law theory. It has influenced considerably Catholic moral theology. The Catholic tradition has insisted that its moral teaching is based primarily on natural law and not primarily on faith or scripture. This emphasis on the rational recognizes that such teaching can and should be shared by all human beings of all faiths and no faith.

Some contemporary Catholic theologians point to two questionable characteristics of the scholastic natural law theory — classicism and physicalism — which have become embedded in official church teaching. Classicism sees reality in terms of the eternal, the immutable and the unchanging. The universal essence of human nature, it holds, is everywhere the same. This approach insists that there are immutable absolute norms, always and everywhere true; that these can be known and, indeed, are known and proclaimed, guided by the Holy Spirit, by the Catholic Church. Physicalism, meanwhile, refers to the identification of the human and moral reality with the physical and biological aspects of human acts. With this in mind, sexuality becomes understood in light of those acts com-

While there may be a growing sense among the faithful that old church teachings on sexuality are in serious need of renewal, as yet, there is no consensus on how to go forward.

mon to human beings and to other animals. Thus, the human never can interfere morally with the physical act of sexual intercourse. It is unnatural, wrong and sinful to do so. It follows that any form of artificial contraception always is wrong.

Today, a growing number of theologians look upon this approach as overly juridical and an act-centered morality that proclaims moral absolutes with little regard to person-oriented situations or values. Whether one agrees or disagrees with this tradition, there should be little dispute that the experiences of many practicing Catholics have parted from this tradition. Our church today operates in an "in-between" moment. While there may be a growing sense among the faithful that old church teachings on sexuality are in serious need of renewal, as yet, there is no consensus on how to go forward. The church needs to open itself to honest discussions on these matters.

RENEWAL IN THE SPIRIT

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would dwell among us. The Spirit lives among us. Recognize and receive that Spirit. Talk with the Spirit. Be led by the Spirit. Opening ourselves to the Spirit's call, we can gain confidence and direction. Opening to the Spirit through meditation and prayer,

we gain tranquility and solid footing. Staying faithful to the Spirit, we will watch our energy grow. I am convinced it will take decades for Catholics to emerge from the sexual darkness in which we live. This darkness is pernicious especially because it can cover the liberating message of the gospels: that we are loved and called to love, that the Christian path is a compassionate one, and that mercy and forgiveness rest at the center of God's love for us. During this period of reconstruction our collective challenge is to stay open to all sincere Catholic voices on sexuality, especially those with whom we disagree. Again, the good news is that new, life-generating Catholic expressions on sexuality are emerging. Yet we have a long way to go. Take heart in knowing we are all wounded and the line between saints and sinners is virtually non-existent. Sinner today; saint tomorrow. But it's worth the effort. Getting our sexuality right opens us to needed healing and will open our church more to its rich sacramental life and view of creation.

So, let's go back to the beginning. Evangelists, begin by recalling that we are forgiven and loved. Work through the basics of faith, sharing them in language more understandable in a post-modern age. Secure your lives in meditation and prayer, always open to new spiritual insights. Never retreat from the world. Preach the nonviolent Jesus and the biblical calls to justice. Allow yourselves to be filled with the Spirit by stepping out of ego and into deeper being. Let the mystic in you emerge. Offer encouragement wherever you go. Evangelize with confidence. The young await your words and deeds.



Thomas C. Fox, former editor (seventeen years) and most recently publisher (eight years) of *The National Catholic Reporter*, is the author of *Iraq: Military Victory, Moral Defeat; Sexuality and Catholicism; Catholicism on the Web; and Pentecost in Asia*. He retired from NCR in January, 2005.

Sharing the Faith: Some Reflections on Teaching about Sex, Love and Marriage

John F. Kane, Ph.D.



Having taught a course on “Christian Love and Marriage” to college students for more than twenty years, I am wary of easy generalizations — whether about the reported sexual/relational mores of this generation or, for that matter, about an adequate contemporary theological account of such difficult, yet pervasively important topics as sexuality, love and marriage. I also am wary of generalizations about how best to teach these topics. Over the years I have changed the texts and the approaches in my class more times than I care to remember.

Still, one cannot spend that much time exploring these topics with young minds and hearts and not come away with some fairly settled opinions. What follows, then, are a few of the ideas that guide me as I try to “share the faith” with what seems an ever younger group of students. Because of the theme of this issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, these remarks are focused primarily on the topic of sexuality as it relates to the broader topics of love and marriage.

My goal in teaching, as I just have indicated, is to try to “share the faith” — to pass on the tradition of Christian and, more specifically, of Catholic wisdom and also of Catholic struggling with matters of sexuality and love and marriage. I hope that students might leave the

I want them to “share the faith,” to find and appropriate the wisdom and the richness of Christian and, specifically, Catholic belief.

class not only with an enriched understanding of what the Christian tradition has believed and believes about sex and love and marriage, but also with a sense of this faith and tradition as a resource upon which they might draw in the personal journey (or the dramatic movement) of their own “love lives.”

That goal implies that I believe this tradition of thought and practice to be one worth sharing. I could, of course, simply try to expose them to a number of different traditions of thinking (from different religions and philosophies), engaging them in critical debate about the pros and cons of various views. That might make a good course, but it is not the course I teach. I want them to “share the faith,” to find and appropriate the wisdom and the richness of Christian and, specifically, Catholic belief. Or, at the very least, to give it serious consideration as they wrestle in their heads and hearts with the cacophony of voices and views coming at them from all sides in our contemporary culture wars.

Of course, like most thoughtful Catholics today, I have some particular quibbles with this or that element of Catholic teaching. Yet as I see them, they are “quibbles,” not questions about basics, and when they arise in class I am clear about the difference between my quibbles and the present state of authoritative teaching — as well as about the present state of important controversies. The students, after all, typically already know far more about current debates and dissents than they understand about the fundamentals of the tradition. Helping them to see the relation of current differences to those fundamentals may help them to get beyond simplistic cultural relativism, to begin to form their consciences in the light of the tradition, and even (one dreams) to become engaged participants in the

ongoing life of the tradition.

Thus, I want them to come to see that the right place for the full expression of sexual love is within the context of marital commitment, and that the full purpose of such love is to express that commitment both in mutual support and by bringing new life into this world. More, though, I want them to come to understand that such expression of sexual love is grace-filled or sacramental — that the Holy Mystery who creates and redeems is so present that such loving (both in its individual acts and through the long journey of a marriage) is for most of us one of the primary ways whereby we experience and participate in the larger drama of salvation.

But I am getting way ahead of myself, and getting too abstract. So let me turn to some specifics.

FINDING A LARGER CONTEXT

I often think that my fundamental purpose in teaching is to help students find a larger context for their own thinking about and struggles with sexuality and its relation to “finding love” and “getting married” and then “staying married.”

Most of them already pretty much know the Christian “rules and regs” about sex. And they also have (so they say) already pretty much made up their minds about those “rules and regulations” (“rules and regs”) — though they typically are still struggling with the convictions they have come to and the patterns of behavior they have adopted. (That seems to be as fundamentally true for the “convinced conservative” as for the supposedly “easygoing liberal.”) Most, too, are pretty committed to the goal of “finding true love,” usually understood in popular romantic terms, often in terms of a belief in “the one” who is out there waiting to be discovered — at times “the one” God already has ordained for them! (Some, of course, have been so burned by personal experience or the experience of friends and parents that they are, at least overtly, skeptical about the notion of “true love.”) And most not only want to get married, but above all are deeply concerned (and worried) about staying married.

In thus generalizing about my students (and in the course by challenging them to generalize about “their generation”), I already have begun the first very important form of “finding a larger context.” Said differently, I always try to begin the course with an extended section on what I call “Society” or “What is going on out there?” (The other two major sections of the course are

called “Grace” and then “Marriage” — each in its way also an effort to help them find a larger context for belief and practice.)

Of course, as I tell them, an adequate discussion of the contemporary context for thinking about and living the Christian ideals about sex, love and marriage rightfully should be the theme of an entire course, or even several courses. So my goal is more to invite them into what I hope will be an ongoing, even lifelong process of critical discernment about “what is going on out there” and how it affects our (especially their own) thinking and practice, and how it affects their understanding (and appreciation and appropriation) of Christian belief and practice.

Part of the problem is that there are so many different interpretations of what is happening in contemporary society with regard to sex and gender, love and marriage. Is it part of a long process of human “liberation,” or an almost terminal loss of “family values?” Or is it perhaps something of both?

My own views incline toward what I would characterize as a “progressive conservatism” (to borrow a useful term from Canadian political history). We are living through a period of much-needed social and cultural changes in attitude and practice, yet in the process we also are losing (or at least are very much at risk of losing) much of the substance of our tradition. Thus, while I find John Paul II’s descriptions of a “culture of death” and Benedict XVI’s denunciations of the “tyranny of relativism” insightful and important, I also find them somewhat simplistic and too easily reducible to the kinds of ideological clichés that characterize our present culture wars. I tend to agree with what strikes me as the far more adequate conservative analyses provided by Robert Bellah and his colleagues in *Habits of the Heart* (1985) and by Wendell Berry in the long title essay of his book *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (1993).

I ask students to read such texts, along with some conflicting analyses in current “family values” and “feminist” and “gay rights” debates. My goal is less to have them agree with my “progressive conservatism” (though I honestly would not mind that) than to break the grip of current ideological polarizations and help them become both more critical of different accounts of “what is going on out there” and more aware of how “what is going on out there” is affecting their own thinking and behavior.

I personally am concerned to help them understand, to name but a few items, how a quite legitimate

For many of them, including the quite committed and even conservative Christians, the dominant context within which they understand sexuality is that provided by “secular humanism.”

“liberation” from traditional sexual fears and taboos and roles also has led to an increasing “trivialization” of sex, not just in the media but also in much contemporary experience; how they are right to be deeply concerned about contemporary divorce rates, but wrong to believe that they simply are fated by social forces over which they have no control; how it is possible to sort through conflicting understandings of marriage, to understand and benefit from the good of different models, and not be seduced by the belief that Christian faith can be lived only in one of them. Yet, again, the goal is less that they might agree with my conclusions than that they seriously engage the critical conversation and deepen personal habits of discernment.

BEYOND THE SECULAR HUMANISM

For many of them, including the quite committed and even conservative Christians, the dominant context within which they understand sexuality is that provided by “secular humanism.” (I use the term for want of a better one and without the frequently negative connotations of its use in many religious circles. Perhaps I should simply say “humanism.”) In that context, as I understand it, sex no longer is dirty or tabooed, but a significant human good. It is good in itself, not something to be feared or avoided, though as a human good it needs to be governed by some form of ethics and humane sensibility. It is, then, especially good when an expression of love — by which typically is meant romantic love and the faithfulness of some form of committed “relationship.” And it probably is better still within the context of marriage. (The students generally are happily surprised to encounter the

They are hungry, indeed, for a deeper sense of the meaning of sex than that provided by secular humanism, even if they do not always recognize that hunger.

data indicating that married couples have better sex.)

My students, then, generally have no problems believing that sex is good. Yet even while they share this vague humanist affirmation of sex, they still have difficulty really understanding what the good of sex is and of appropriating that good in their own lives. Partly this is because these widely shared cultural affirmations are so vague and general. Thus they do little to counter the many forms of fantasy and the many emotional pressures that pervade both thought about and personal experience of sex. For while the contemporary “secularization of sex” in many ways has been a good thing, liberating both thought and experience from unnecessary taboos, it has not led to the further and deeper liberation which we humans really need. Rather, it seems to have contributed in its own way to the contemporary trivialization of sex — not the kind of trivialization involved in promiscuous sex, but a trivialization, nonetheless, because it blocks access to fuller and deeper meanings. One way to approach such deeper meaning, then, could be thought of as an effort to “re-sacralize” sexuality, though I much prefer to speak of this effort in terms of the reality of grace.

SEX AND GRACE

For one problem with at least some efforts to recover the sacred meaning of sex is that they resort to a type of phony mystification. Every sexual act, we sometimes are told, must involve a total expression of love, a total gift of self and a total openness to life. The key words in such exhortations are “every” and “total.” Most happily married couples, I suspect, respond to such rheto-

ric with a roll of the eyes. For they know that their sexual experiences are manifold and varied — from pure fun, to mutual support and shared consolation, to occasional disappointment, to just as occasional moments of transcendent ecstasy and self-gift.

And most of the students basically know this, as well — either from personal experience, or from good parental guidance and the common sense of their peer culture. Thus they also roll their eyes or find some other way of saying “Get real!” when they read or listen to some recent articulations of a theology of the body or of sexuality. They are hungry, indeed, for a deeper sense of the meaning of sex than that provided by secular humanism, even if they do not always recognize that hunger. And they generally are, despite a fair number of obstacles, quite open to the possibility that such meaning might come from Christian faith. But they want to understand that faith in terms that make sense of their actual (if vicarious) experience. And this demands, among other things, not only a creative retrieval of the language of grace, but above all a corresponding refocusing of their understanding of God — a recovery of the sense of God’s challenging but loving presence to all the dimensions of ordinary and secular life, including sexual life.

Said differently, this means a shift from a primarily moral discourse about sexuality to a more theological discourse, and a theology in service to the kind of a spirituality that encompasses the ordinary, not just the extraordinary. For Christian and Catholic moral teaching about sex always has assumed a prior sense of the reality of God and of God’s saving work in our lives — thus a sense of human failure and sin, but even more fundamentally, a sense of the reality of grace.

I have not found any easy ways to challenge and invite students into this kind of a retrieval of the language of God and grace. For one thing, the effort continually runs up against certain received understandings of God and grace, even if they are no longer or not deeply believed. As I already have suggested, I do not think it helps much to focus on identifying the reality of God and grace with “transcendent” or “ecstatic” experiences — even with experiences of total self-giving in sexual embrace. Such an approach may open the door to the possibility that sexual loving can be a source and experience of grace, but by itself it leaves too much of the ordinary and secular experience of love (whether of sex or of marriage) untouched by

grace. It is akin somewhat to the still-prevalent equation of the sacrament of marriage with the marriage ceremony (and not with the life symbolized and entered via that ceremony).

I find help in some recent writings about grace — such as the popular but accessible *A New Look at Grace* by Bill Huebsch — as well as in a fair amount of recent writings about the spirituality of ordinary or everyday life. Finally, though, it is an ongoing struggle to help students overcome their inherited sense of a great disjunction between God, on the one hand, and sex on the other. Some of them have worked very hard to keep these two dimensions of their lives carefully sealed off from each other. Yet, once opened to the possibility that God is not the enemy of their sexuality — a possibility glimpsed in their encounter with the opening chapters of *Genesis* and the poetry of *The Song of Songs* — most are willing, at least to some degree, to enter the struggle for a new integration of God and sex via a new understanding of grace. The hope that that disjunction between God and sex might be overcome comes as real “good news” about their love lives.

DRAMA: ACTION, SUFFERING, GROWING

Yet at this point it is crucial that they come to see this struggle for an integration of sexuality and spirituality in dramatic terms. By “drama” I do not mean the stuff of soap opera or cinematic thrillers. No; I mean that more classic sense of drama that begins with Aeschylus and represents the best of our Western understanding of the dramatic. (I am indebted to the writings of William Lynch, S.J., for the idea that drama is a crucial category for understanding human development. I especially recommend the opening sections of *Christ and Prometheus* and the final section of *Images of Faith*.) The Greek *drama* literally means “action,” and Aeschylus’ sense of the dramatic involved the complex and subtle sense that all significant action or initiative entails suffering (*pathos*). It is, moreover, only through the messy up-and-down, back-and-forth rhythm of action and suffering that we humans come to real learning and human development (*mathos*). That is as true for the great actions of classical and modern drama as for the more ordinary actions of our lives.

Perhaps in some ways it is true especially for our love lives — for the initiatives and sufferings that we hope will lead to marriage, and for the typically pas-

In any event, it seems especially important that an appropriate sense of drama provide the fundamental context for the students’ struggling with sexuality.

sionate yet hesitant fumbling which we hope will lead to sexual maturity and integration. Or perhaps it is simply that my students are aware especially of the dramatic character of the actions and sufferings involved in their stumblings toward love and marriage.

In any event, it seems especially important that an appropriate sense of drama provide the fundamental context for the students’ struggling with sexuality. For most, there is plenty of drama in this dimension of their lives, but for too many the struggle to integrate faith with sexuality is less a matter of the rhythms of dramatic action and suffering than a matter of simple opposition between clear-cut rights and wrongs, an opposition that supposedly ends when one finally arrives at the haven of married life. Indeed, one of the reasons many reject the moral guidance of the church is that such clear oppositions do little to help them sort out the messiness of their pre-marital experience.

I do not want to underplay the significance of moral teachings about right and wrong in matters sexual. But I do want, again, to help students to find an appropriately human context for appropriating such teachings. And I am arguing that the idea of drama and the developing of an adequately dramatic sensibility about their own lives (and about the struggles of the larger culture) is an important element of such a context. In so arguing, moreover, I have more than the Greeks on my side. I also have Scripture, especially the dramatic sense of the struggle of God and God’s people that pervades the Hebrew scriptures. Certainly that scriptural sense of the dramatic is no stranger to the reality of sin. Yet it also gives constant testimony to the

reality of grace and provides the broad framework of the idea of covenant — of the struggle for fidelity and against infidelity — within which students might best understand their own struggles for fidelity to themselves, to the other and to God.

It is my experience that students who begin to interpret their experience of sexuality within the context of their own dramatic journey into love and fidelity — a journey with failures, dead-ends, beautiful as well as hard learning experiences — are better able to find rich resources for the journey in the moral and theological wisdom of the faith. I especially would recommend a little gem of a book for the help it gives students in developing this sense of a journey with self, others and God. It is Christopher Pramuk's small book of spiritual exercises, *Surviving the Search: Sexuality, Spirituality and Love* (1998).

These, then, are a few of the ideas and understandings that have guided me over the years as I have struggled to "share the faith" with college students in a course on Christian Love and Marriage. The ideas and understanding need (and, hopefully, in the course actually receive) more extended discussion than my brief sketch here has allowed. They also need to be complemented by other important ideas. Yet they have, I believe, made it possible for me to share the wisdom of faith with young adults as they strive toward fuller human development in their sexual lives and in their search for love that is real and enduring.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Bellah, R., R. Madsen, W.M. Sullivan, A. Swidler and S.M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985.

Berry, W. *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*. New York and San Francisco, California: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Huebsch, B. *A New Look at Grace*. Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988.

Lynch, W., S.J. *Christ and Prometheus*. South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.

Lynch, W., S.J. *Images of Faith*. South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973.

Pramuk, C. *Surviving the Search: Sexuality, Spirituality and Love*. Denver, Colorado: Living the Good News, Inc. (A Division of the Morehouse Group), 1998.



John F. Kane, Ph.D., is a professor of Religious Studies and chair of the Religious Studies Department at Regis University, Denver, CO.

The Second Annual James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Symposium on "Spirituality and Healthy Living" will be held June 16-17, 2006, at Regis University in Denver, CO. Please visit our website (www.regis.edu/hd) for details.

Elder Sexuality

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.



Issues of sexual health and activity in the elderly are receiving greater attention today than in years past. I recall when I was a psychology intern, a young psychiatric resident was asked to consult with an elderly man whose primary complaint was of a less than satisfying level of sexual activity. It appeared that the chief source of the gentleman's problem was a lack of sexual responsiveness on the part of his wife. At our weekly staff meeting, the resident explained that, after making certain the wife had no physical problems that might render her unable or unwilling to engage in sexual activity, his intervention centered on helping the man recruit his wife. He was to accomplish this by ensuring that his personal hygiene and attire met with his wife's approval. He was to buy her flowers, take her out to dinner and focus his sexual activity on giving her pleasure. After the young psychiatric resident completed his report, the chief psychiatrist, not yet fifty years of age, asked for feedback. Most of us around the table felt the recommendations made were satisfactory, and we expressed interest in learning about the outcome of the intervention. As our comments drew to a close, the chief psychiatrist shook his head and declared himself flabbergasted. His mode of approach would have been to counsel the man to accept the realities of his age (about eighty years old), adjust to a lower level of sexual activity and sublimate his sexual desires. In his opinion, by the time a person was about fifty years old, he or she

Although change in our appreciation of elder sexuality had been coming slowly, the aging of the Baby Boomers has brought the issue to the fore.

ought to expect loss of libido and a diminishing of desire. I am happy to report that the intervention was successful and that the gentleman reported increased satisfaction with his sex life.

Attitudes of the sort expressed by the chief psychiatrist have conspired to keep the topic of elder sexuality out of the public eye for many years. These attitudes had a negative effect especially on women whose sexuality often was seen as problematic throughout earlier parts of the life cycle. Church teachings that viewed marriage solely through the lens of procreation brought added difficulty when a woman passed through menopause. Having lost her *raison d'être* as a producer of children, she became invisible. Only in recent years have church and society begun to recognize that the joy of intimacy and the experience of one's sexuality are applicable to older as well as to younger people.

Although change in our appreciation of elder sexuality had been coming slowly, the aging of the Baby Boomers has brought the issue to the fore. Not content to be relegated to the sidelines, this age cohort has obliged the medical profession and society as a whole to take issues of elder sexuality seriously. Many older persons want and are able to lead an active, satisfying sex life. A pattern of regular sexual activity helps preserve sexual ability. When problems do occur, they ought not to be viewed as inevitable but rather as the result of disease, disability, drug reactions or emotional upset. Medical care is needed, not resignation.

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

Sexual activity does undergo change as a person grows older. Both men and, to a lesser extent, women show a slowing of response to sexual stimulation. In women, normal physical changes occur chiefly in the shape, flexibility and lubrication of the vagina. These

changes reflect lowered levels of estrogen. While normal changes in men vary with the individual, many of these changes reflect reduced erectile of the penis. As a result, greater stimulation may be needed; the erection may not be as firm as in the past, and, following orgasm, the loss of erection may be more rapid.

The incidence of illness and disability increases with age. These factors can affect sexuality in later life, but even the most serious diseases do not necessarily warrant stopping all sexual activity. One major reason offered for ceasing sexual activity is heart disease, particularly a heart attack. Yet the risk of having a fatal attack during intercourse actually is low. In fact, an active sex life may decrease the risk of a future attack. Diabetes, on the other hand, is a disease that can cause impotence. Once the diabetes is controlled, however, potency may be restored; although, in some instances the impotence is permanent. Those who have suffered strokes (cerebral vascular accidents) also are able to resume sexual activity. It may be necessary, though, to use different positions to compensate for weakness or paralysis. Positioning and gentleness also are ingredients needed to maintain healthy sexual functioning in those suffering from arthritis or other illnesses that include a component of chronic pain.

If a hysterectomy or a mastectomy has been performed correctly, there is no physical reason why a woman might not continue to be sexually active. Often it is the cosmetic aspect of the surgery or an attitude on her part or that of her partner suggesting the woman is "less feminine" that interferes with sexual functioning. Couples counseling may be needed to restore healthy sexual functioning. Recent advances in the treatment of prostate cancer and in prostate surgery render loss of potency far less likely than was the case years ago. In most instances, sexual capacity and enjoyment can return to the pre-surgery level.

Excessive use of alcohol, an often hidden but very real problem with elders, reduces potency in men and delays orgasm in women. Alcohol abuse is probably the most widespread drug-related cause of sexual problems. Tranquilizers, anti-depressants and certain medications used to control high blood pressure also can cause impotence, while other drugs may lead to failure to ejaculate in men and reduction in sexual desire in women. These side effects may be reversed when the medication is stopped. It is necessary to be proactive. Ageism and stereotyping of the elderly unconsciously may affect a physician's choice of treatment. Alerting

the prescribing physician to the importance of sexual functioning in one's life might encourage him or her to find a drug that will address the primary problem without interfering with sexual activity.

A common emotional problem in older men is fear of impotence. While many men suffer occasional impotence due to fatigue, stress, illness or excessive alcohol consumption, fear of impotence may exacerbate this problem to the point that it is fear, rather than a physical factor, that is the primary reason for lack of potency.

Older couples also are subject to many of the same tensions and sources of emotional distress that plague younger couples. Added stress may be related to retirement and subsequent shifts in lifestyle, as well as to illness, an increasing number of personal losses or fears of mortality. The sexual difficulties that accompany emotional distress may be relieved through counseling directed at the underlying sources of stress.

THE GIFT OF TOUCH

Our ability to develop a sense of ourselves as elder persons who continue to value the sexual aspects of life may be enhanced by our coming to appreciate our bodies as they are instead of focusing on our losses. We have a duty to ourselves to keep as physically well as possible. Proper nutrition, exercise and rest are important elements in maintaining our health, our physical attractiveness and our capacity for sexual functioning in later life. Attitude and self-image also are important, however. Rather than succumb to the Madison Avenue mentality that promotes impossible ideals of thinness, beauty and eternal youth, we need to value the wisdom of our bodies that have served us so well over the years. For example, thinking of the roads our feet have taken us along, acknowledging the dancing and sports they have allowed us to enjoy, we might be inclined to view our feet with gratitude and pleasure, blessing them rather than complaining because our steps are slower or less steady now. Enhancing our satisfaction with our bodily selves helps us maintain a healthy sense of self-esteem and willingness to consider ourselves sexually attractive people.

Developing an appreciation of the gift of human touch also helps us maintain a sense of ourselves as sexual beings. One of the most ancient of human bonds, touch is an important means of communication. To be touched is to be called into life and into love. Touch that is loving and gentle also is healing and

Older couples also are subject to many of the same tensions and sources of emotional distress that plague younger couples.

restorative. As we age, loss of long-term relationships with friends and spouses limits the likelihood of our being touched by another loved person. Yet the need for such contact does not disappear. It is important that we recognize the ongoing nature of this need and seek alternative ways, such as massage, for example, to satisfy it. It is even more important, however, to appreciate those times when loving hands do reach out to us and to extend our own hands to others.

A lovely ceremony I attended several years ago demonstrated a wonderful way to share the gift of touch. A community of women religious had gathered for a workshop addressing issues of aging and retirement. As part of the program, one sister prepared a guided meditation, asking each person to look at her hands and to visualize them as embodying all that she had felt, carried and experienced during her lifetime. The leader called upon the sisters to recall the hands they had clasped in greeting, in sorrow and in pain. She urged them to remember the use they had made of their hands in work and the Eucharistic bread they had held and distributed. The leader then asked each person to treasure, affirm and thank her hands for the Spirit acted through them. The ceremony concluded with each sister gently, respectfully and lovingly anointing the hands of the person beside her while praying that the fragrance of the oil would heal and strengthen her holy hands.

SEXUALITY AND SENSUALITY

Savoring the sensual aspects of life offers us an expanded view of the sexual. While acknowledging the sensual as helpful at any phase of life, it is useful especially when considering elder sexuality. Appreciation of

We might think of elder sexuality as love that has been forged by pain transcended by cooperation and compromise.

the sensual helps us to live as sexual beings even when we are faced with physical diminishment. A combination of relatedness with sensuousness engenders sexuality in our relationship with the world at large. To appreciate the beauty of things, natural or crafted, is to touch the spirit of creative love that simultaneously is hidden and revealed in the works of nature and humankind. To touch and feel, to smell, to see, to taste, in a word, to perform all human activities while savoring the richness and the beauty involved in these activities and their objects, is to open ourselves, at whatever age, to the sensual-sexual nature of our world and ourselves. When the whole of our environment is viewed as capable of stimulating creative erotic energy, we become able to experience a much wider range of sexual arousal and fulfillment.

SEXUALITY, INTIMACY AND LOVE

While sexual activity alone may have been sufficient to create emotional closeness during earlier periods of life, in later life we need to learn to make love in a way that delivers both psychological and physical satisfaction. More than ever before, the capacity to create and sustain psychological intimacy assumes an ascendant role in our lovemaking. The ability to share our inner life as well as our bodies is necessary if we are to enjoy fully the experience of being seen, known, accepted and understood. It is this capacity for truly seeing the other and being seen in return that brings older partners a sense of self-cohesion, security, peace and joy. Through sharing of this sort, both physical and psychological, we may experience the sacramental aspect of sex. The phrase from the wedding service, "with my body I thee worship," may be lived most fully and poignantly when the body is not flush with the beauty of youth but seasoned with the lines and scars of a lifetime.

Although the integration of sex with love properly begins in early adulthood as we grapple with the developmental tasks of intimacy, new dimensions of intimate, sexual loving become available in later life. Awareness, acceptance, tolerance, objectivity, cooperation, fidelity, caring, forgiveness, humor, generosity and love are among the qualities that develop from and support mature relationships. Grounded in respect, trust and gratitude, our love includes the entire history of our relationship with our partner. Our love grows as we struggle with and help each other over the years, trusting that each would be there for the other while respecting the other's separateness and autonomy. Each self having become stronger, in later life we experience greater capacity for intimacy within the relationship. Loving union may be enjoyed without fear of losing one's self.

We might think of elder sexuality as love that has been forged by pain transcended by cooperation and compromise. It is a love that is expressed in the simple things of everyday life and the caring communicated through thoughtfulness and attentiveness to the mundane tasks that sustain home and family. It is perhaps only in our later years that life with its various possibilities will be able to shape itself into something approximating a human work of art. And in a similar fashion, when personality reaches its final stages of development, lovemaking and sex may achieve the fullest possible growth, becoming even greater than they were at earlier points in life.

Gifts of friendship also play an important role in maintaining our sexuality in later life. By this phase of life, many persons, more often than not women, have lost their partners. Just as at earlier stages of life, however, persons without partners continue to experience sexual needs and seek ways to experience and express themselves as sexual beings. It is important at all life stages that we be appreciated as women and as men, as sexual persons. Although genital activity may not play a role in our friendships, friendship does offer us a way of sharing ourselves intimately with another person. Listening to people, attempting to understand their points of view and responding to them with honesty and kindness renders us attractive to others and enhances our sense of connection to them.

Love includes a transcendent dimension to be considered when reflecting on elder sexuality. Those persons who participated in the interviews and discussions that comprise the book *Elders On Love* tended to move

out beyond the limits of physical sexuality to speak of covenants of love and meaning shared with others through addressing the crucial issues of our time with the virtue of compassion. For some, this meant reevaluating our American culture to achieve simplicity and humility rather than quick fixes in a consumer-driven society. Some noted the need to provide guidance for youth, and others spoke of offering service to the larger earth community. Having lived long lives, these elders noted that the love they felt went beyond sexual attraction. It was a love that engendered a sense of fellowship and shared support for others, love that was able to transform their behavior in all of life, not merely in the physically sexual realm. What they experienced was the need to move out beyond the ego, no longer concerned with defending or enhancing the self or one's self-image, to an expanded community-consciousness.

The self-transcendent quality of elder sexuality and love may find expression in a variety of creative endeavors. When we exercise our creativity we become aware more intensely of certain aspects of our surroundings, encountering them in such a way as to enlarge our consciousness. Our sense of self is expanded, and we experience a lowering of the barriers that generally stand between the world and us. Creativity is social in nature, and creative achievement is characteristically an offering to society rather than a solitary amusement. Thus, as elders whose sexuality has matured into relationships of loving service, we have the capacity to use the energies of our later years to make a gift to the future of our society. Author Thomas Moore suggests our sexuality could make a positive contribution to social concord if it could reach the stage where it had wings, rather than remaining mired in the details of problems and inadequacies. What better task for elder sexuality than to help society recover the values of beauty, gracefulness and love and seek to incorporate them into the fabric of our lives through attention to public architecture, city parks, musical events or preservation of precious wilderness areas?

I am reminded of psychologist Robert Peck's views on ego-transcendence and his urging that we live and love generously and unselfishly, secure in the knowledge that we have built for a broader, longer future than that limited to our individual egos:

Through children, through contributions to the culture, through friendships — these are ways in which human beings can achieve enduring significance for

The self-transcendent quality of elder sexuality and love may find expression in a variety of creative endeavors.

their actions that goes beyond the limit of their own skins and their own lives. It may, indeed, be the only knowable kind of self-perpetuation after death (Creative Aging: A Meaning-Making Perspective).

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Fischer, K. *Autumn Gospel: Women In The Second Half Of Life*. New York: Integration Books, Paulist Press, 1995.

Lakritz, K. R. & T. M. Knoblauch. *Elders On Love*. New York: Parabola books, 1999.

Moore, T. *The Soul of Sex*. New York: Harper Collins, 1998.

National Institute on Aging (NIA), Bethesda, Maryland, & Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, New Jersey. *Help Yourself To Good Health* (a compilation of NIA Fact Sheets).

Peck, R., in M.B. Carlsen. *Creative Aging: A Meaning-Making Perspective*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991.



Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist who practices in Washington, D.C.

A Spark Across the Gap

James Torrens, S.J.

WHAT WE GO LOOKING FOR

is the won't-take-no woman
scrapping with Jesus
to get her daughter well

is the biddy who touches him
through the jostling crowd
because Enough of female trouble!

is the loudmouth beggar
who has no eye for badges
and won't let them shush him

is the chief with a servant sick
who knows all about authority
and just a word will do

that's the faith for you
the blip on the world news
to send a reporter after

elements in our thesis and the “notes,” or qualifications, for each. I did, however, pass that exam, thanks to the charity of my professors. I can just hear their discussion: “Give him one more year. See if he can get it together.”

As I think of it now, I chuckle to compare my exam with that of Dante, conducted by none other than Saint Peter in Canto 24 of “Paradise,” the third part of *The Divine Comedy*. In this interchange between the pilgrim to heaven and the chief of the apostles, the scholastic method and the classic distinctions of medieval theology take center stage. Dante gets a direct question from the master: “What is faith?” He answers with the well-known definition from *Hebrews*, from Chapter 11, which lists the heroes of faith in the Hebrew Testament. Says Dante: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for / and clear proof of what is not apparent; / this strikes me as its quiddity” (verses 64-66). “Quiddity” — when did we last hear that word? One can see why this sentence from *Hebrews*, profound in its own right, provided so much grist for the Scholastic mill. (For more about Dante’s examination, see my translation and commentary, *Presenting Paradise*, Scranton University Press.)

I must admit now, long after my examination about faith, that I still cannot very well define it. I must add, however, that I know it when I see it. I have seen it, as have we all, in prisons, parishes, the confessional, hospital rooms, even college dorm rooms. In other words, I have met people who show, who give palpable evidence, that they recognize God as active in their lives and around them. They are the unsung heroes and heroines of faith. There is a contemplative core to such people. Externally the evidence they give of faith can be of two sorts, either a vigorous response of embodied and active faith, or a determined effort of just holding on against all odds.

Karl Rahner had his own take on this bifurcation of faith. According to Rahner, as explained by

Many moons ago — decades, actually — at the end of my first year of theology studies in Belgium, I had oral exams to take. My first year abroad had been a grueling one, and this prospect did not improve it. My first examiner started me off with a thesis about faith — what we can say about it dogmatically. The thesis, the way we learned it, had four or five segments, each with a “note,” or specification, about where the statement stood on the scale of doctrinal certainty. The maximum on the scale was *De fide definita* (defined as a matter of faith). The bottom end of the scale, as I recall, was “theologically certain” (“a little shaky,” we would joke). I made a mishmash of the distinct

Harvey Egan, S.J. (in *Karl Rahner, Mystic of Everyday Life*, Crossroad Publishers), future Christian spirituality will be of two types, wintry spirituality — “found in courageous perseverance in silent faith, trust, love and unselfish service, despite life’s seeming emptiness” — and enthusiastic spirituality, “an almost naïve immediacy to God, bordering on a naïve faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

The most reliable schoolroom and showcase of faith is undoubtedly the Gospel of Matthew. According to Matthew, evocation of faith is the constant concern of Jesus in his public life. Jesus prods and pokes his disciples towards faith; he laments all the non-response of his hearers, and he is quick to praise any spark of faith that he finds, the more unexpected the better. Some wonderful figures sparkling with faith pass briefly but memorably across the pages of the gospel. Saint Mark provides some of the liveliest details about them.

There is the pagan woman up near Phoenicia who comes to Jesus desperate for her daughter’s healing. He replies to her — roughly, it would seem — that his mission is only to the Jews. It is not right to throw the children’s food to the dogs. But she knows who she has here before her and will not be put off. Everyone knows her response: Even the dogs should get scraps under the table.

There is the woman with the twelve-year discharge of blood (see especially Saint Mark, 5:25-34). The doctors too have done their bleeding of her resources. She pushes her way near enough to touch the magnetic power of this emissary of God, confident that if only she dares to do that it will heal her. And it does.

There is Bartimaeus of Jericho, who may be without sight but not without voice to make his need loudly heard. Politeness, patience, modesty go to the winds when the healer is close by and the possibility of vision is in play.

There is the Roman platoon leader, full of concern for his ailing servant, probably a slave.

He knows genuine authority when he sees it and knows how it works. He doesn’t need a home visit from the holy man. “Merely say the word and my servant will be healed.”

In all of these cases, if we are a little sceptical, we can ask, “Is their faith driven by recognition of the divine, really, or by need?” But we can recognize that this is a false disjunction. Both factors are at work. These are people provoked by desperation but acting on conviction. They have been awakened, alerted, by need. And then they have imagined what they could do, and have done it. Back at Louvain, citation of these passages might not have earned me a passing grade, but the fact remains, they certainly illustrate faith at work.

Considering that famous sentence from *Hebrews*; we have to admit that it leaves a lot out. It leaves out the element that is paramount when a man and a woman pledge their faith to each other — the inevitable risk taking, the leap of faith. The act of entrusting themselves to one another has an unconditional quality not adequately based on sufficient evidence, says Harvey Egan, following Rahner. Faith, in its very essence, in other words, is a stretch. It’s a spark across a gap.

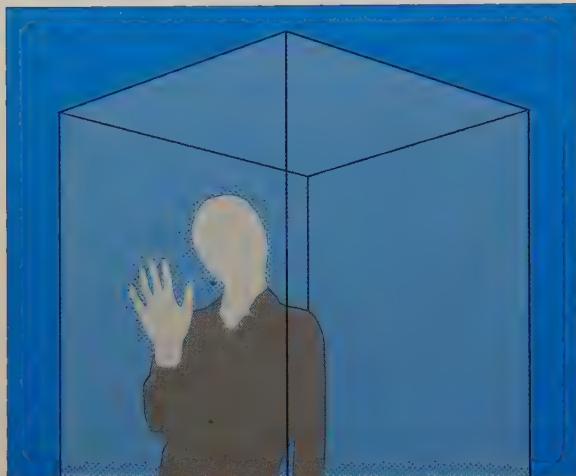
Those gospel vignettes once more help us to get a bead on what a true believer is. Here’s how we should believe, they tell us: with courage (even, says Rahner, “the courage to throw our arms around” the historical person of Jesus), with imagination, tenacity, conviction. We don’t have to be somebody to give this witness that can light up the world.



Father James Torrens, S.J., is a member of the staff at the Cardinal Manning House of Prayer, Los Angeles, California.

Is God Enough?

William A. Barry, S.J.



In the “Contemplation to Attain Love,” the last exercise of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of Loyola proposes this prayer as an appropriate response to my contemplation of all the gifts I have received from God:

Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, all my will — all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me (S.E., n. 234).

The St. Louis Jesuits’ version of this prayer has us singing: “Give me only your love and your grace; that’s enough for me. Your love and your grace are enough for me.” Are we serious when we sing these words or when we pray Ignatius’ prayer? Is God enough?

My title is meant to be provocative, but the question is a serious one. Can we truly say and mean that God is enough? Does God want us to come to this point? Some spiritual writing gives the impression that those who are serious about the spiritual life must cut themselves off from all created things, including other people. For

example, I found this on the Internet from one Carmelite community: "St. Teresa of Avila says clearly that the desire of the Carmelite is '*to be alone with the Alone.*' God reveals Himself to the heart in solitude, and therefore, each nun works alone, as much as possible, either in her cell or office. There is to be no speaking without necessity outside of the two daily recreations. The strict enclosure, walls and grates separate the religious from the world and help to promote and protect this solitude." Is this what it means to find God enough, to be "alone with the Alone"?

Buddhist spirituality, it seems, advocates the giving up of all desire. Desire, according to Buddha, is the cause of all human unhappiness; hence, the way to perfection is to strip oneself of all desire. Could this be what it means to find God enough? Some Christian ascetic theory seemed to suggest the necessity of a similar effacement of all desire except the desire for God. Is this what it means to find God enough?

At the beginning of *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius proposes for consideration the "Principle and Foundation":

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created.

From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it.

To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent (author's emphasis) to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden (S.E., n. 23).

Could it be that we find God enough by becoming "indifferent" to everything that is not God? In the history of spirituality that little word "indifferent" has caused the spillage of a lot of ink and has provoked some attitudes that seem less than Christ-like. The notion of treating a thing or a person with indifference sounds rather uncaring, even cold. Modern environmentalists would find in these words of Ignatius the seeds of attitudes that have led to the present plight of our globe.

Could it be that we find God enough by becoming "indifferent" to everything that is not God?

TURNING TO A HIGHER POWER

Now let us try to approach an answer in a positive way. Let me begin with an example that may seem far afield. Many recovering addicts tell us they have been saved from addiction to alcohol or drugs or some other substance by admitting they were helpless as regards the addiction; turning to a Higher Power was their only solution. When you listen to the stories of recovering addicts, you realize that in some significant way they are saying that God is enough for them, that they had tried any number of other solutions to their addiction, but finally had to admit that they indeed were helpless, that they clearly were not in control. Thus, they had no other recourse but to turn to a Higher Power, which many have come to recognize as the Mystery we name God. Without God, they believe and say, they would be dead from the addiction or still in its clutches, and so just as good as dead. That it was a choice between alcohol and a Higher Power becomes clear in this statement by a recovering alcoholic. "I would hang on to sobriety for short intervals, but always there would come the tide of an overpowering *necessity* to drink and, as I was engulfed in it, I felt such a sense of panic that I really believed I would die if I didn't get that drink inside" (*The Big Book*, p. 306). Notice that alcohol had become her salvation, what she believed in and what, in effect, she worshipped. Then she chose to put her trust in another Power, to worship at another altar, and this was enough for her.

But no one in any 12 Step Program that I know of ever would say that this radical and absolute dependence on God requires or even tolerates a denial of one's need of other human beings. In fact, almost all the stories in the *Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous tell of a frightening aloneness, an almost total loss of connection to other human beings and to one's environment

But human beings have learned, through their folly, the disastrous consequences of worshipping an idol instead of the living God.

while in the throes of the addiction and before taking the first three steps of the program. What started them on the road to recovery was the help of other addicts who were in recovery and who offered them the hope that they had found in the program and in the fellowship of A.A. and similar groups. When they embarked on the program, they began to recover their physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual health and in the process found joy and friendship beyond their wildest expectations. (See Molly Monaghan's article, "A Faith that Works," HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Spring 2005, pp.12-18.)

GOD IS ENOUGH

Here is an example from *Anonymous Disciple* by Gerard Goggins, a novel about two Jesuits, who were recovering alcoholics. In this scene Jim, the talkative one and the protagonist of the novel, is visited in the hospital late one night by Fred, the other Jesuit. Jim engages in this soliloquy.

"I wonder what kind of man I would be if I was not an alcoholic. I wonder what kind of Jesuit. I'd probably be proud and off the track. I'd have wound up being an apostate or a ladies man. I would have been a disgrace to the Society. And instead, because I'm an alcoholic and because of A.A. and because of you, Fred, I have found love and peace and fulfillment. I have found friendship, and I have found my vocation even if it's not the one I expected" (pp. 167-168).

God absolutely was necessary for their sobriety, but God's enoughness did not require the loss of all other company. Rather, the opposite; God's enoughness seems to have given them back to companionship and friendship. This is one clue to the answer to our question.

In the book of Exodus we hear God saying:

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20: 4-6).

We can read these verses and cringe; or we can read them in the spirit of the freed alcoholic, realizing the truth they contain. The Bible uses human language for an almost impossible task, namely, to tell us who God is and what God wants. In order to have a dim understanding of this revelation we must not focus on single texts, but try to take in the whole sweep of biblical revelation, along with the ways the people of God have experienced and interpreted that sweep over the centuries since the Bible first was written. The Mystery we call God revealed over this long time, and especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, cannot be discerned in the image of a jealous human lover. But human beings have learned, through their folly, the disastrous consequences of worshipping an idol instead of the living God. These consequences play themselves out in individual, familial and international history. These consequences feel like punishment for the folly, punishment exacted by a "jealous God." Hence, the writer of Exodus attributes the consequences of idolatry to God's anger.

In the book, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God*, author Nicholas Lash notes that the word "god" refers to what we worship. Most often we find out who our "god" is in "crunch time," as it were. In the trenches of World War I, the Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray, came to see that the Christian churches of Europe were worshipping a tribal god, praying to "their god" to give them victory over their and their god's enemies. On a rehab leave back in Great Britain, Macmurray was asked to preach at a Sunday service; he spoke of the need for Christians to prepare for the reconciliation of the nations after the war. This Christian audience greeted him with hostility. The alcoholic woman mentioned just a moment ago found out that she was worshipping alcohol when she faced the terror of not being able to find another drink.

WORSHIPPING AN IDOL

Once I found that I was worshipping an idol. I had fallen in love, having developed a profound friendship with a woman religious. As a result of her own experiences in her congregation she decided that she no longer belonged in religious life. I supported her decision and thought that I also supported her desire to date and marry. It was fine until she told me that she was falling in love with a man she had begun to date. My heart seemed torn in two; I found myself distraught and deeply pained, unable to focus on other things. I prayed for healing because my better self wanted what was best for her. On one occasion during this time of turmoil I used the story of the two blind men in Matthew 9 for prayer. They follow Jesus up to his house; Jesus turns to them and says: “Do you believe that I can do this?” Jesus was talking to me, too. I knew immediately that if I said, “Yes,” I would be healed. But I couldn’t say it. If I were healed, I felt, I would lose her friendship. That was too much; I could not ask for healing. The best I could do, and it was, at first, a weak request, was to ask for the desire to be healed. I was, as recovering alcoholics say of themselves while caught in their disease, “insane.” It seemed that I could not live without her friendship; that was an insane idea. In addition, the only way I could be her friend was through being healed of this insanity. My heart needed to become what I said it was, a heart committed to religious chastity, a heart committed to a nonexclusive friendship. I was, thank God, freed; I continue to be her friend and a friend to her family.

The English theologian James Alison provides another example of the worship of an idol and gives me the words to understand my own past predicament. He was a Dominican priest teaching in a Dominican center in South America. One day the dean called him in to tell him that fourteen religious superiors had written a letter saying that they would not send seminarians to the center as long as Alison was on the faculty. The reason: Alison’s activism on gay issues. Without going into the details of what happened, I want to focus on his discovery when he went on what he calls a “Jesuit retreat.” During this time of prayer he came to see that he was worshipping an idol. He was looking to the hierarchy, not to God, to tell him that he was okay. He writes:

In my violent zeal (to win a hearing about homosexuality) I was fighting so that the ecclesiastical struc-

Only God could tell him what he needed to hear in order to accept himself as a beloved son of God.

ture might speak to me a “Yes,” a “Flourish, son,” precisely because I feared that, should I stand alone before God, God himself would be part of the “do not be” ...

In other words, God would reject him. He realized that he had despised of God and had been trying to manipulate church authorities to say that he was okay as a gay man. They would, he hoped, shore up his identity, remove his self-loathing. Now he understood that no human structure, no human being could do what only God could do. Only God could tell him what he needed to hear in order to accept himself as a beloved son of God. Finally, during this retreat he heard God speak that “profound ‘Yes’” to him that he had despised of ever hearing, that the “little gay boy” was loved by his Father (p. 39). He concludes by writing, “The ‘I,’ the ‘self’ of the child of God, is born in the midst of the ruins of repented idolatry” (p. 40).

AWARENESS OF THE TRUTH ABOUT OURSELVES

Alison gives me words to understand what had happened to me and, possibly, what happens to anyone who comes to believe that he or she needs someone or something in order to feel whole, to be someone. Ultimately, only God can do this for us. Nothing else will suffice to give us ourselves.

In “crunch times” we become aware of the truth about ourselves, and the truth often is devastating. We realize that we have been worshipping idols. This realization, however, comes as a great grace, not as a disaster. Now we can pray and mean that great prayer of the New Testament, “I believe; help my unbelief.” To the extent that we believe in God, to that extent we are free and whole and loving. To that extent we have the “hundredfold.” But the only way to that hundredfold lies through the darkness of giving up our idols, those

To be human is to be created by God's desire; and God desires our friendship.

persons or things that, deep down, we believe we cannot live without.

Notice, also, that there is a way in which this death to idols can seem like losing everything else; it feels as though our situation after we have given up the idols will be to be all alone or, even more frightening, to be no one. Why? Because we are using these idols in order to shore up our identity. Who we are seems tied up with them. Moreover, until the scales are torn from our eyes, it does seem as though we cannot exist without them. It seems that God is demanding that we surrender all that we are and have and that we then will be "alone with the Alone." indeed. In addition, as Alison makes clear, to give up our idols means to live with the consequences of being defenseless in a hostile and violent world.

But, is this not just what Jesus did? Is it not clear that Jesus lived in this world as a human being without idols, as the type of human being God intends in creating us in God's own image and likeness? As such, Jesus becomes the victim of the violence unleashed by a world that cannot see any other way to be human except to live in constant fear of the other, whoever that other may be.

ADAM AND EVE'S TEMPTATION

So we come close to grasping how God is enough through experiencing what occurs when we try to forge our own identity through idolatrous means. The story of Adam and Eve is a paradigm of our human situation. They are created in the image and likeness of God and enjoy all the bounties of the garden-of delights. They want for nothing, it seems. But they are tempted. If they eat of the forbidden tree, they are told, they will become like God. Notice that they already have, by gift and grace, what the tempter tells them they will grab by eating; they are, by God's creative gift, made in the

image and likeness of God. As such, they will, in some way, live forever because God desires them into existence. They exist because God wants them, and God's desire is the only guarantee they have of living forever. But they come to believe that they can gain control over their existence, become like God, by eating the forbidden fruit. Do you see the subtle point here? They already have, by God's gracious gift, what they now want to have by their own effort, their own will. It is insanity, indeed, to think that they can control life, can become like God by anything they do. Yet, they go ahead and act insanely, just as all of us addicts and idolaters have done over the centuries.

A character in P. D. James' detective novel, *Devices and Desires*, says: "We need, all of us, to be in control of our lives, and so we shrink them until they're small and mean enough so that we can feel in control." This is what happens when we, like Adam and Eve, act insanely or irrationally. It is insane or irrational to act as though we were or could be in control of our lives; it is irrational to act contrary to the way the world really is. But the world and all that makes it up is, in actuality, contingent, is dependent at every moment on the gracious desire of God that it exist. Existence is gift. If we do not accept this basic truth and, I mean, accept it in our hearts and bones and flesh, we are living irrationally. The world and all of us who are in it exist by God's gracious desire, not by necessity. Moreover, we are desired into existence because God wants us, not because we are necessary to God. We are desired into existence so that we can accept freely God's friendship, God's love. To be human is to be created by God's desire; and God desires our friendship.

MADE FOR GOD'S FRIENDSHIP

There is a hole in each of our hearts. We are made for God's friendship, and nothing else will satisfy us because nothing else will satisfy God. As Saint Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, we are all made for God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in God. God is enough in this sense: God is the deepest desire of our hearts; nothing else but God will satisfy this desire; and, without God, nothing else will be of any ultimate use to slake our deepest thirst. God is enough to satisfy this thirst. But the paradox is that when we are one with God we can enjoy everything and everyone else non-possessively.

In a nutshell, then, God is enough because only

God will satisfy our deepest desire. But when we are one with God, then we have everything else because God is the Creator of everything and everyone and is not niggardly, but abundant, exuberant generosity. However, to live in this free way we have to be willing to give up the illusion that we can hold on to anything or anyone by our own efforts; we have to be willing to lose everything and trust that God will provide everything we need.

I hope that I have been pointing toward God, that what I have written makes orthodox sense and that it gives an orthodox and true, even if obscure, understanding of what it means to be “alone with the Alone,” of how God can be understood as a “jealous God.” Only by letting go can we have it all. But this is not the arbitrary demand of a jealous lover; rather, it is the way the world is: bountiful gift. When we are freed of illusion, we can say and mean:

Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, all my will — all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all that to me. I now give it back to you, O Lord. All of it is yours. Dispose of it

according to your will. Give me love of yourself along with your grace, for that is enough for me (S.E., n. 234).

“Your love and your grace are enough for me.”

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, 3rd Edition (commonly known as *The Big Book*). New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1976.

Alison, J. *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*. New York: Crossroad, 2001.

Hederman, M. P. *Love Impatient, Love Unkind: Eros Human and Divine*. New York: Crossroad, 2004.

Lash, N. *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God*. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005.

AD CAMPAIGN WARNS TEENAGE GIRLS ABOUT ONLINE SEXUAL PREDATORS

On June 8, 2005, *The New York Times* Business section carried an article by Jane L. Levere describing a new ad campaign aimed at alerting teenage girls in blunt language and images of the danger of solicitation online by sexual predators.

A study conducted by the Crimes Against Children Research Center of the University of New Hampshire showed that one in five children received a sexual solicitation in 1998 and 1999, with girls the primary target. Internet use by teenagers has increased to the point where eighty-seven percent of all teenagers use the Internet and, thus, are in danger of solicitation. The ad campaign aims to alert teenagers, who tend to think of themselves as invulnerable, to beware of online predators, one ad showing a teenage girl and a man talking ending with the blunt message: “Online predators know what they’re doing. Do you?” Another ad, whose final shot shows a trashed apartment being searched by police, one of whom is putting a computer keyboard into a plastic bag, ends with a teenage girl saying in a voice-over, “Before you start an online relationship with a guy, think about how it could end.”

All the ads note that one in five children online is solicited sexually and direct viewers to www.cybertipline.com, a web site operated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, where reports of sexual exploitation can be sent.

Source: Article by Jane L. Levere in the June 8, 2005, *The New York Times*

The Other Side of Middle Age

Emerging from middle age is grand. Some things are much easier. At the "Y" this morning there was a young woman on my left running at 6.5 mph. (I peeked.) On my right was a young man running at 9.5 mph. Wow. I was loping along at 3 mph, knowing that it was just right. Working out no longer is motivated by cosmetics but rather by health. Increase bone mass. Lower blood pressure. Tighten up muscles. I was feeling good because I am able to walk at a good clip, on an incline, for thirty minutes before I do the weight machines. It's easy to let go of the frantic search for a perfect body. Emerging from middle age does that.

My internal voice has shifted. I pay more attention to my gut, to my wisdom, to my common sense and let others think what they will. It is knowing that if someone is mean it is more about them than it is about me. It gets easier with age and removes stress that doesn't need to be there.

Cells that always were task-oriented have been reprogrammed. It's great to have a leisurely cup of coffee in the morning, strong coffee that really is good to the last drop. I watch the birds and the squirrels as they do their thing outside my kitchen window. On warm days, coffee is on the front porch. With a watchful eye I guard the neighborhood.

There is time now to watch the next two family generations and to be in awe of the kids whose diapers I changed changing diapers of their own children. How they raise their babies with such care and tenderness.

To watch their little ones as they discover life and beauty is such an enormous treat. To be able to stop at their homes to get a "kid fix." And then being able go back home with the scent of innocence and purity to carry me through a distressing day.

I can sort and toss and take the time to read every newspaper, card, letter and book that will not be returned to the shelf. It's okay to donate all the clothes in the "thinner" part of the closet, not caring that I probably never will fit into them again. Old shoes gone. Old photos saved.

There is no guilt these days in working or reading or watching television until 2 a.m. and knowing that no alarm will need to be set for the morning. No rush to

beat the traffic, to be on time, to be prepared for yet another work day. Naps are relished. Many days have Sabbath space with time to think, pray and wonder. There is a leisure here that is a welcome change.

The search for continued growth and development takes me down fresh paths, paths that are personal and uncharted. It is a time when virtue takes on a different meaning. There is a new understanding of courage, a courage that is not focused on risking failure or taking on challenges, but a courage that embraces new understandings without fear. There is an excitement for a generosity that rejects clutching things, time, or ideas close to me and that embraces instead the experience of extending them to anyone who needs what I have to offer. Having takes a back seat to giving. It is a time when any duty easily can be set aside to make time for kindness. There is a modified sense of patience — to be able just to be, to listen, to wait.

The energy that always was present, allowing me to put in long days with plenty of overtime, is gone. There is a new kind of energy now. An energy that gets me through the difficulties that present themselves because these easy days do have some bumps in the road. Caring for a friend or a relative in the hospital and witnessing pain while being helpless to ease it. Spending time at the nursing home and adjusting to the ravages of aging and illness. Crying freely at wakes and funerals. Working through all of the "whys" when preparing to say goodbye. And, then, saying goodbye.

Understanding the rhythm of life is more of a priority now. But time is available to work at it. To put all that I have been taught into the mix in order to come up with answers that fit my experiences and stretch my faith. To reclaim in a new way beliefs that have sustained me through good days and bad.

I am grateful for all the days behind me that have formed me and prepared me for the future. In the meantime, I take each day as it comes, enjoying the ease. Grief, when it happens, is the sweetest pain of all. It tells me about love never forgotten. Always present. Who could ask for anything more?

— Margaret Cessna, H.M.

Index 2005

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 1

Personal Strengths and the Aging Process
Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

A Faith That Works: The Spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous
Sister Molly Monahan

Sexual Addiction: Surrender to God
Anonymous

A Gentle Healing
Kathryn Williams, P.D.D.M.

Changing the "Default" Image of God
William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.

Love Did Not Deter
James Torrens, S.J.

To Lessen the Pain—A Call to Action
Tom Smith

Ministering to Suicide Survivors
Katherine Tardif, M.A.

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 2

Forming Ministers for the Twenty-First Century
Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.

Educating for Leadership
James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.

Beauty, Deep Beauty
Margaret Cessna, H.M.

Surrendering to God's Plan for Us
Gerald M. Fagin, S.J.

Sparring with Muhammed Ali
James Torrens, S.J.

Christian Maturity Through Ignatian Spirituality
William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.

From Victim to Victimizer?
Anonymous

The Value of a Living Will
George Eppley, Ph.D.

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 3

Developing Christian Maturity in Our Pluralistic Society
Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.

Wisdom's Threefold Path to Christian Maturity
Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

The Church Needs A Theologically Educated Laity
Michael J. Sheeran, S.J.

We Have a Dream
James Torrens, S.J.

Fostering/Hindering Christian Maturity
Luisa M. Saffiotti, Ph.D.

Recovering the Value of Guilt
Stephen B. Bennett, Ph.D.

Faithful Servant, Mature Christian
Margaret Cessna, H.M.

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 4

Sexuality Brewed in a African Pot: A Personal Account of Paths
of Sexual Maturation in Africa
Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, S.J., Ph.D.

Coming Out Party
Valerie Schultz and Zoe Elizabeth Schultz

Understanding Infatuation and Devotion
Monica Applewhite, Ph.D.

Evangelization from the Inside Out: Bringing Faith to the Young
Thomas C. Fox

Sharing the Faith: Some Reflections on Teaching about Sex, Love
and Marriage
John F. Kane, Ph.D.

Elder Sexuality
Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

A Spark Across the Gap
James Torrens, S.J.

Is God Enough?
William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.

The Other Side of Middle Age
Margaret Cessna, H.M.

A Reminder to Subscribers

Does your subscription to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** expire with this issue?
If so, please take a moment to renew by visiting us online at www.regis.edu/hd and filling out a subscription card today.
Why not give a Christmas gift of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** this year?

JESUIT

+ tradition
+ service
+ leadership

The Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions offers innovative and dynamic undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs designed to prepare leaders committed to excellence within the health care professions while offering cutting edge knowledge critical in today's health care environments. The Rueckert-Hartman School serves more than 2,000 students in four departments: Health Services Administration and Management, Nursing, and Physical Therapy. Programs are structured to allow students the flexibility and convenience in reaching their educational goals. Students also benefit from small classes and close interaction with faculty and peers.

www.regis.edu/hd



3333 Regis Boulevard
Denver, Colorado 80221-1099

Non-Profit Org
U. S. Postage
PAID
Denver CO
Permit No. 3101

#11096559# VOL 27 #4 P HD
GRAD THEOL UNION/LIBR SERIALS
2400 RIDGE RD
BERKELEY CA 94709-1212